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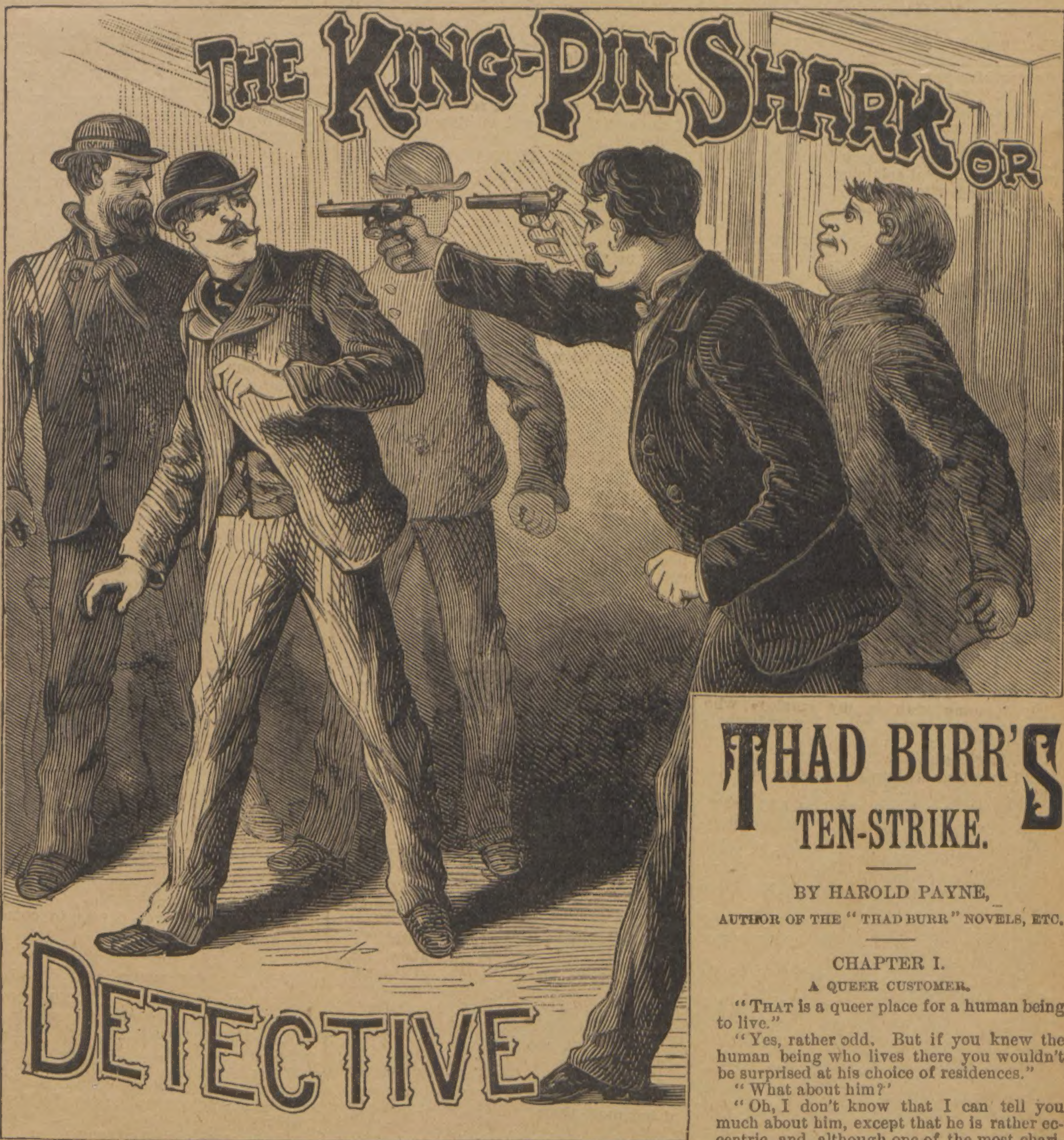
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THAD BURR'S TEN-STRIKE.

BY HAROLD PAYNE,
AUTHOR OF THE "THAD BURR" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A QUEER CUSTOMER.

"THAT is a queer place for a human being to live."

"Yes, rather odd. But if you knew the human being who lives there you wouldn't be surprised at his choice of residences."

"What about him?"

"Oh, I don't know that I can tell you much about him, except that he is rather eccentric, and, although one of the most charitable and kind-hearted men in the world, the

THAD AND TOM LEVELED THEIR REVOLVERS UPON THEM AND THEY STARTED TO RUN.

neighbors avoid him as though he were a contagion. But what is this coming here?"

A cloud of dust was seen arising in the distance, and a moment later a light road wagon, drawn by a runaway horse, came dashing up.

As the horse neared the spot where the two men stood, the front wheel of the vehicle struck the bank at one side of the road, upsetting the wagon, hurling the single occupant out, after which the panicky animal dashed on with the shafts.

The two observers hastened to the fallen man and found him unconscious.

Assistance was summoned from the house and the stranger was carried in.

When the dust had been removed from his face he was found to be a young man of not more than twenty-five, handsome, intelligent-looking, and well dressed.

Nothing was discovered on his person by which to identify him, and, although a gold watch and some other pieces of jewelry were found on him, there was no money.

A physician was summoned from the village close by, and everything within human possibility done for the patient, but along about nightfall he died, without having recovered consciousness.

Meanwhile the two who had witnessed the accident, one of whom was the great detective, Thaddeus Burr, and the other Doctor Matthew Watson, his friend, had sauntered up the road to where the wagon had been upset, for the purpose of examining the wreck and getting some clew to the identity of the stranger.

A lap-robe lay at the side of the highway, with several splotches of blood on it, and marked with the initials "S. L. S."

At sight of the initials Watson turned pale.

"Well, by George!" he ejaculated.

"What is it?" inquired Thad, curiously.

"Those are the initials of Samuel L. Sutter."

"Possibly. But who is Samuel L. Sutter?"

Watson jerked his head in the direction of the house at the foot of the hill, which Thad had just been commenting on as being a queer place for a human being to live.

"The man that lives down there."

"Well?"

"Well, the lap-robe evidently belongs to him, and I should say that the rig did also, if Sutter owned any rig, but he don't."

Further investigation resulted in the discovery of a slouch hat, which evidently did not belong to the injured man, inasmuch as a Derby hat was found near him when he was picked up.

The discovery of the slouch hat seemed to puzzle the doctor more than finding the lap-robe.

"If I am not greatly mistaken," he said, "that hat belongs to Tom Gillam."

"Who is Tom Gillam?"

"A young man in my employ, who serves as coachman, stable boy and whatever I have for him to do."

"Where is he now?"

"I presume somewhere about the stable."

"Hadn't we better see him and ascertain whether he knows anything about this affair?"

Watson shook his head.

"We can see him, but it is not likely that he knows anything about this. How could he?"

"I am not prepared to say," rejoined the detective, "until I have seen and had a talk with him."

"Would it not be better policy to go down and see Sutter?"

Thad reflected a moment and then answered:

"No, I think we had better see Gillam first."

But they were saved the trouble of going after him, for at that moment a short, thick-set young man, with a florid complexion, pushed his way through the hedge at the roadside some distance from where the two men stood and came whistling toward them.

"Here he comes now," observed Watson.

As the young fellow came up, Watson held the hat out toward him and said:

"Is not that your hat, Tom?"

The young man took the hat with a careless air, scanned it coolly, and replied:

"Looks mightily like it. Where'd ye get it?"

"Here in the road. It was evidently in the rig when the accident took place."

"That's funny. I wonder how it got there?"

"That is what we should like to have you explain," answered Watson, eyeing him closely.

Tom laughed carelessly.

"Then ye'll never find out, for I'll never tell ye."

"Do you mean to say that you do not know how the hat came along with this wagon?"

"No more'n the man in the moon."

Not a particle of agitation was betrayed by the young man, not a tremor in his voice.

Thad felt pretty well satisfied that he was telling the truth, and interposed.

"I think we had better take your advice and go down and call upon your friend Sutter."

At this Gillam glanced curiously from one to the other of the two men, and chuckled to himself.

Burr and his friend started down the long, rocky hill in the direction of Sutter's house.

Doctor Watson was a retired physician of modest wealth, but enough to live on comfortably.

Tiring of city life, he had bought a small piece of ground on Long Island, not far from the village of Flushing.

His grounds were upon a hill, overlooking a swamp, through which ran a small stream.

His neighbors, with the exception of this man Sutter, were well-to-do, respectable citizens, and, so far as Sutter was concerned, really very little was known about him.

He attended to his own business and rarely mingled with the rest of the neighbors, but was well known for having dispensed a great deal in charity. But, somehow, nobody seemed to like him, and it was pretty generally believed that there was some dark secret hidden behind his life.

Thad Burr was paying a visit to his friend Watson at the time, had only just arrived that afternoon, and the two friends, after luncheon, had strolled out in front of the house to enjoy the air and the scenery that spread away from the house, when the accident changed the course of affairs.

"What is there about this Sutter?" asked Thad, as they descended the hill.

"As I said before, I know but very little about him. In fact, no one seems to know anything about him. He came here two years ago and bought that bit of swamp land down there and put up that strange medley of a house."

"Rather a good house, too."

"Yes, too good for such a location."

"What does he do?"

"That is as much of a mystery as everything else about him."

"He certainly can't make a living off that bit of swamp land."

"Certainly not."

"He must have an independent income from somewhere," insinuated Thad, studying his friend's countenance.

"Yes—or worse," was the dry answer.

"You don't think—?"

"It is hard to tell what to think," interrupted Watson. "People about here have their theories, though. They may be wrong, but it certainly does look queer for a man of Sutter's evident intelligence to settle in such a place as this."

"Has he any family?"

"A wife."

"Does she mingle with the neighbors?"

"No. Nobody has ever had a glimpse of her more than half a dozen times since they came here. She appears to be an invalid."

"She has a good chance of remaining one, or dying, from the looks of this place."

By this time they had reached the stile which crossed the fence a few yards in front of the house.

The house, of red brick, had already become splotched with patches of green mold from the dampness of the place.

The yard was overgrown with rank, wild weeds, and littered with all manner of boxes, barrels and empty fruit cans.

As they approached the dwelling a mammoth St. Bernard dog came trotting toward them in a no friendly manner, and Thad and his friend stopped, in something of a quandary what to do.

But at this juncture a man came to the front door, a newspaper in his hand, and called out:

"Here, Sultan. Come on, gentlemen, he won't molest you."

At the sound of his master's voice the dog turned and trotted majestically back toward the house.

The man with the newspaper came on out into the yard, bareheaded and smiling, to greet his visitors.

"Ah, doctor," he said, extending his hand, "it isn't often that I have this pleasure. Glad to see you. And your friend?"

"This is my friend, Mr. Johnson, from New Jersey," volunteered Watson, to the great surprise of the detective.

"Glad to know you, Mr. Johnson," assured Sutter, grasping his hand. "Will you walk in, gentlemen?"

Thad noticed as they went in that Sutter was a tall, handsomely built person of fair complexion, and appeared to be the soul of good humor, his features being continually wreathed in smiles.

They passed into a long, low sitting-room, plainly but substantially furnished, and as the host turned to invite his guests to seats, he caught sight, for the first time, of the lap-robe which the doctor had slung over his arm and brought along.

"Hullo!" he cried, and then broke out in a hearty laugh. "What are you doing with that, doctor?"

"I have just come to return it to you," replied the other, dryly. "You recognize it, don't you?"

Sutter took the robe and scrutinized it carefully for an instant, and then exclaimed:

"Well, I'll declare! if it isn't mine. Where did you get it?"

Watson described the accident which had taken place in front of his house.

"That is very strange," exclaimed Sutter, with a puzzled expression. "Bah! there is blood on it. Where did that come from?"

"That is another mystery. Do you know nothing of the young man who was in possession of this robe?"

"A young man?" mused Sutter. "Why, yes, it must be the one who stopped here this afternoon to ask me the way to Flushing."

"Did you lend him a lap-robe?"

"Come to think of it, I did. He complained of being chilly, and asked me for something to put over his knees."

At this point Thad chanced to glance in the direction of the door, and beheld the visage of a dark, coarse-featured woman with gleaming black eyes, peering in with a devilish scowl.

Sutter seemed to divine her presence almost at the same instant, for he turned toward the door and asked in a meek voice:

"What is it, Hannah?"

The woman beckoned him to come to her, and he obeyed.

CHAPTER II.

THE SECRET MEETING.

Sutter joined the woman out in the hall, and a whispered conversation ensued, which lasted for some moments.

When he again entered the room, however, his brow was as placid as usual and the same gracious smile played about his features.

"And you say the young man was thrown from the buggy and killed?" he resumed, seating himself facing Watson and the detective.

"Yes," replied Watson. "At least he was thrown from the vehicle, and was in a fair way of giving up the ghost when we left. I hardly think he can survive longer than sundown."

"He must have received a very severe injury."

"Yes—supposing him to have been a sound man before he fell."

"Which is hardly likely," interjected Thad, "if, as you say, he complained of chilliness this warm day. Pardon me, Mr. Sutter, but do you know nothing about this young man?"

"Nothing more than I tell you. He drove up to the fence something like two hours ago, I should say, and hallooed, and when I went out he asked me the way to Flushing, and when I had directed him, he complained of feeling ill and chilly, and asked me for something to spread over his knees."

"Was he alone in the buggy?"

"Yes."

"You are sure of this?"

"As sure as I am that there are three of us here," he said, laughing.

Watson was about to mention the finding of Tom Gillam's hat near the wrecked vehicle, but the detective, anticipating his intention, gave his friend a look which admonished him to silence.

Concluding that there was nothing more to be learned from this man at that time, the two callers took their leave.

As they shook hands with Sutter he said:

"I hope you may be able to unravel the mystery connected with this affair, gentlemen, and if I can do anything to assist you, I shall be only too glad."

The sun was just setting as the two men passed over the stile, and in this gloomy place it had already begun to grow dark.

A rough stone wall flanked the road in front of the house, and as Thad and his friend walked along this toward the foot of the hill they saw the same hard-featured woman standing close to the wall some distance from the stile.

She had her black eyes fixed upon them, but seeing that she was discovered she glided rapidly along the wall and disappeared in a clump of bushes.

"I wonder who that woman is?" queried Burr.

"I have been indulging in the same speculation myself," rejoined Watson. "I have often seen her about the place, and wondered who she was."

"She cannot be Sutter's wife?"

"No, his wife is a small, delicate woman. I imagine this woman is a servant."

"If she is, she appears to exercise a good deal of authority over him."

"So it struck me when she called him out into the hall. By the way, old man, what do you think of the whole matter, so far as we have gone? You think this fellow may have had something to do with the young man's taking off, don't you?"

"I will not say that yet, but before I form an opinion let us see what the doctor up at the house has made out."

When they reached the house the injured man was dead, and the doctor was preparing to leave.

"Well, what do you find, doctor?" inquired the detective, taking the physician aside.

"The man has received some internal injury which caused his death," was the confident reply.

"No indications of foul play?"

"Foul play? None whatever."

"Do you think a post-mortem would be advisable?"

"That is for the coroner to decide. I see no necessity for anything of the kind."

The coroner and sheriff were both sent for, and, pending their arrival, Thad made a close examination of the body.

First he examined the throat and chest minutely for wounds or contusions.

There was not a scratch.

The man had received a slight bruise on the side of his face where it had come in contact with a stone or some other hard substance in the road, but Burr was satisfied that this was not sufficient in itself to produce death.

He next examined the mouth and lips, and finally got down and scented the lips.

Having done so he arose, nodded with satisfaction, and made an entry in his note-book.

On the arrival of the sheriff he made a few inquiries, after which he and the coroner held a lengthy conference, and then the coroner said:

"There is nothing more for us to do here, sheriff. I order that the body be removed to the village, and I shall hold an inquest some time next week."

"You think, then," interposed Thad, "that it will not be necessary to hold a post-mortem?"

The coroner and sheriff both looked at the detective contemptuously, and the former asked:

"What for?"

"For the purpose of determining how the man came to his death."

The two officials laughed in chorus.

"Why, we have decided that already," sneered the sheriff. "The man came to his death by being thrown out of his buggy. What more do you want?"

"I want to know how the man met his death, for I am satisfied that there is more to it than the mere falling out of the buggy."

"Perhaps you had better find out, then."

"That is what I shall endeavor to do, inasmuch as you gentlemen do not appear inclined to do your duty."

"Perhaps you know what you are talking about?" growled the coroner, angrily.

"I guess he does," interjected Watson. "It's a strange thing when my friend Thad Burr does not know what he is talking about."

The two officials exchanged glances, and then the sheriff asked:

"What do you think caused the man's death?"

"He was poisoned, for one thing."

"Poisoned?"

And both men indulged in another fit of laughter.

"Yes, poisoned."

"How do you make that out?" demanded the coroner.

"I have a way of determining these matters. But it is only a theory, and it remains with you to ascertain the truth."

The coroner looked serious.

"But this is not the only mystery connected with the case," pursued the detective.

"What other mystery is there?" inquired the sheriff, also becoming grave.

Thad produced the lap-robe with the blood spots on it.

"You will observe," said he, "that there is sufficient blood on this robe to indicate a copious wound, whereas the deceased has no wounds to speak of, and none that could have produced that amount of blood."

The coroner took another look at the body, and then said:

"That is true. What do you make out of it?"

"That is a mystery which I shall not attempt, as yet, to explain, but from other evidence I conclude that there was some other person with the deceased shortly before he met with the fatal accident."

"But you stated a while ago—at least Mr. Watson did, and he said you were with him—that the man was alone at the time of the accident."

"At the time of the accident, yes; but the fact of another man's hat being found near the wrecked buggy, together with the presence of the blood stains on the lap-robe, points pretty clearly to the fact that another man had been with the deceased."

"And you infer that the blood on the lap-robe was from the other man?"

"That is the only tenable theory, so far as I can see at present. As I said, it is only a theory, but it will do no harm to probe it a little way."

The sheriff shook his head and growled:

"Pretty much like the wild theories you fellows always have in connection with these matters, and they never amount to anything. Come, coroner, we've done our duty; let's go."

And, after the coroner had repeated his order for the remains to be removed to the village, the two officials got into their buggy and drove away.

Watson had a team put to a wagon and complied with the order.

Some time later, when dinner was over, Thad told his friend that he believed he would take a walk, and that he thought he had better go alone.

Disguising himself with a beard and a slouch hat, he descended the hill once more.

When he reached the stone wall he crept along it as far as the clump of bushes where Hannah had disappeared.

Thad crept in among the bushes and found that they concealed an opening in the wall.

He was about to creep through when his movements were arrested by the sound of low muffled voices close at hand.

The moon was concealed by a cloud at the moment, rendering it exceedingly dark, so that he could see no one, but he could make out that the speakers were but a short distance away.

The detective could discover nothing of the nature of the conversation, but by listening attentively he was able to ascertain that one of them was a woman, with a very coarse, unwomanly voice.

Anxious to learn what the conversation was about, as he believed it had some reference to the late tragedy, Thad attempted to move up closer to the pair, but he had scarcely taken a step when the moon came out full and bright, showing the figures of two persons, a man and a woman, not ten yards from him.

Fortunately he had not emerged from the shadow, so that they did not observe him, and he shrank quickly back further into the shadow of the shrubbery, to make sure that they should not do so.

He was now able to discern enough of their character to see that the woman was none other than the person whom Sutter had addressed as Hannah, and that the man was Tom Gillam.

When the moon came out and revealed them, they remained to talk but a moment longer, and then took up what appeared to be a valise between them and made off across the marshy field toward the house.

Fortunately, they had not proceeded far when the moon again disappeared, and Thad took advantage of the darkness to follow.

He had come within a few hundred feet of the house, and had seen the pair by the dim light pass around to the rear of the dwelling, when the moon again burst forth, and almost at the same instant the big St. Bernard came bounding toward him, barking at a furious rate.

There was nothing for it now but to use his legs, as he did not wish to raise the alarm by shooting the dog, so he took to his heels and was soon back to the opening in the stone wall.

Thad lost no time in making for the opening, with the howling dog at his heels, and was about to pass out when a figure rose up out of the darkness and leveled a gun at him.

CHAPTER III.

A TERRIBLE WARNING.

Luckily for the detective, again a cloud passed over the moon at this juncture, leaving himself, as well as the mysterious figure, obscured in gloom.

Thad sprang quickly back and crouched close to the stone wall.

This gave him time to prepare for combat or defense, and he took advantage of his opportunity.

Drawing his two revolvers, he placed himself with his back against the wall and awaited developments. But none came.

After waiting for several minutes, and the moon shone out once more, and, listening attentively, he could hear no movement, he concluded that it would be safe to reconnoiter.

He moved cautiously along the wall until he came to the opening, and still seeing or hearing nothing, he passed through to the outside of the inclosure. No one was in sight.

Whoever the picket had been, he had evidently stolen away as silently and mysteriously as he had come.

And, now he thought of it, Thad began to wonder what had become of the dog which had been at his heels but a moment before.

He stepped back and peered through the shrubbery into the inclosure, but no living thing was in sight.

He could discern the smallest object in the whole expanse between him and the house, and not a sign of anything was to be seen.

Burr decided, therefore, that the coast was clear, and only waited for another disappearance of the moon to make another attempt to get to the house.

But, although he waited long and patiently, no such opportunity seemed likely to offer.

Nearly every vestige of a cloud had vanished from the heavens, and the moon, it seemed to him, had never shone so brilliantly.

But just there he made a discovery through the medium of this same brilliant light.

The house, which sat back a hundred yards from the road, was on the very edge of a swamp covered with a thick growth of willows.

These willows extended for a long distance—to the limits of Sutter's possessions, in fact. By following the course of the stone wall around he would be able to reach the line of trees and, concealed in their shadow, he could proceed in comparative safety to the house.

No sooner had the idea taken form than he carried it out, and was soon groping his way along the willow grove at the margin of a sluggish, stagnant, ill-smelling stream, in the direction of the mysterious house.

The ground was marshy, and the detective frequently went half-ankle deep into the yielding soil.

After nearly half an hour's toil he approached the house.

The place appeared to be in total darkness, but, on closer approach, Thad noticed a light emanating from what appeared to be a skylight or some sort of opening in the roof.

Moving round to the rear for the purpose of discovering where the light came from, Thad found himself half-knee deep in water, and the thick branches of the trees obscured the top of the house so completely that his mission was unsuccessful.

An unusually large tree grew very near the rear of the dwelling, so, with a view to reconnoitering the place from its branches, he waded back in its direction.

When he had reached the tree, which was not more than two yards from the house, he was met by a sight which startled him.

At a window which faced him sat a woman with the face of a corpse.

The room in which she sat was so faintly lighted as to reveal the woman very imperfectly—just sufficient, in fact, to bring out her ghastliness.

Her hair, which hung loose about her face and shoulders, was excessively black and of prodigious length and luxuriant growth; her eyes were remarkably large and black, and, at this moment, were fixed upon the detective with a strange, half-savage stare, although she could not have discerned more than an outline of him.

As soon, however, as he looked up at the window, the woman beckoned him to approach more closely.

The whole scene had filled Thad with an indescribable sense of dread, such as he had never before experienced, but, after a momentary hesitation, he obeyed the summons, and waded to the side of the house, for the water stood nearly a foot deep against the wall on this side of the building.

When within a few feet of the window, about on a level with his head, the woman raised the sash with a quick, spasmodic movement, and the detective then discovered that the sash was latticed on the inside with iron bars like that of a prison.

"Come closer," admonished the woman, in a hoarse whisper.

Thad moved up as close as he could get, and the inmate proceeded.

"You are trying to discover the mystery connected with this house. Don't do it, for you will never succeed, and your efforts will result in your death. Dozens have tried before you, and none of them have survived. Take a poor, miserable creature's advice, and make your escape while you have an opportunity."

Thad, of course, was startled by such a warning, but he asked, with professional coolness:

"What is the mystery? You warn me of my danger, so you cannot be in sympathy with the evil-doers who congregate here. Why not divulge the mystery to me at once?"

"I cannot," she cried, with a low, piteous sort of wail. "If I were to die for it, I could not—would not!"

"But, as I take it, you yourself are held here pretty much as a prisoner. Why not permit me to rescue you?"

To his astonishment, she broke out into a wild burst of hysterical laughter.

"I a prisoner?" she cried, in her peculiar half-whisper. "I, who am the mistress of this place? How absurd!"

"Why are these bars across the window, then?"

"Oh, those?" with another laugh. "Those are put there for my protection."

Burr noticed, however, that she gave a shudder as she glanced at the bars.

"Protection from what?"

"Oh, anything. This, you must confess, is a rather dismal sort of place, and there is no telling what might come up and try to break in and molest me."

Was the woman a lunatic and the alleged mystery only imaginary?"

He must know more. All his detective instincts were on the alert now, and he resolved to probe to the bottom of the mystery which enveloped the place and people.

"You say you are the mistress of the house. Then, I take it, you are Mr. Sutter's wife?"

"Yes, I am his own sweet, devoted little wife, and he is madly infatuated with me."

"It is strange that he should keep you in such a place as this if he is so madly infatuated with you."

"Oh, that is no doing of his. That is my own fancy. I would not live any place else."

Thad was about to reply, when he noticed that there was a sudden change in the woman's features.

The half-wild look which he had noticed on first seeing her, and which had softened somewhat during the conversation, had returned, and she whispered excitedly:

"Go instantly! You have stayed too long already. I hear them descending. They will be here in a few seconds. Save your life while you can!"

Although not alarmed by this fresh warning, Thad decided that it would be the part of wisdom to take her advice—temporarily at least.

The woman now had closed down the window and vanished.

Thad started to make his way along the side of the house in the direction from which he had come, but when near the corner, the sound of footsteps coming round the end of the house caused him to pause.

What was to be done?

Escape in that direction was impossible, and any attempt to cross the marshy stream behind the house might result in his discovery, so his only course was to escape around the other end of the house.

Quickly retracing his steps, he succeeded in reaching the opposite end of the house.

Peering round the corner of the building into the court on that side, where the moon fell clear and bright, he saw that the way was open to him.

A moment later he was plunging along through the mud and water at the margin of the stream, keeping well within the shadow of the willows, as was necessary to escape detection, and to his satisfaction, neither man nor dog appeared to impede his progress.

After a push of ten or twelve minutes Thad was pleased to find himself once more on the public road, but wet to the hips and greatly fatigued.

Having decided to abandon further research for the present, the detective put off along the highway with what speed his fatigue would permit, determining to reach his friend's home as soon as possible. He had reached the foot of the hill, and was about to descend, when a figure emerged from the bushes at the side of the road and stood fully disclosed in the moonlight in the middle of the highway, but at once clutching his revolver in his side-pocket, Thad walked boldly on.

The figure, that of a man, had the face averted, as if gazing at some object up the hill, and Thad was unable to discern the features until within a couple of yards distant, when the man turned, and, to Thad's surprise and delight, he recognized his friend Watson.

"Well, old fellow," exclaimed his friend, "I had about given you up for lost. Where have you been all this time?"

"It is a long story," replied Thad. "Let us walk and talk at the same time. I am as wet as a drowned rat."

CHAPTER IV.

A FRUITLESS INTERVIEW.

Watson opened his eyes very wide when Burr related his adventure to him.

"I knew there was something mysterious about the place," he declared, "but never imagined it as bad as that. Don't you think we had better get out a warrant at once and have the fellow arrested?"

"By no means!" demurred the detective. "We have no positive evidence that he is guilty of anything. Appearances are against him, but it will be necessary to secure more evidence. To do that, I shall drive over to the village in the morning and try to prevail upon them to hold an autopsy on the body of the dead man. I am now convinced that my theory of poison is the correct one. That proven, one point is gained—namely, that the man came to his death by unnatural means. That alone will furnish an incentive for searching for his slayer. Until the fact is established that the man was murdered there is little use of hunting for a supposed criminal."

"Your theory is a sound one, so far; but what then?"

"As soon as I return I shall pay the gentleman in the swamp another visit—not like the one I paid to-night, but the contrary. I shall make a regular formal call on him, as we did to-day."

The following morning the two friends drove over to the village and at once sought the authorities.

The coroner, now more affable than on Thad's previous meeting with him, readily ordered the post-mortem, and Watson, being a physician, was allowed to assist at the examination.

It did not take the doctors long to determine as a fact what the detective had ventured as a theory. Sufficient chloral hydrate was found in the stomach to have killed five ordinary men!

"This proves," observed Thad, that the poisoner was an expert. An ordinary poisoner would have used either arsenic or strychnine, but the expert crook always uses this drug, as it produces almost instantaneous stupor or death, according to the size of the dose, and causes no pain, while either of the others produces a more or less lingering death, and causes most excruciating agony. This stuff is what is commonly known among the fraternity as 'knock out drops.'"

Thad's theory of the manner of the man's death having thus been established, he was given full authority to go ahead and do what he could to discover a clue to the murderer.

He and Watson drove back to the latter's home, and found that the runaway horse had been recovered and brought back to the Watson homestead.

Neither Watson nor any of his neighbors recognized the horse as one that belonged in the neighborhood, and a little examination of the harness proved that that at least belonged to a well known livery stable in New York, so it was presumable that the horse also came from the same place.

Late in the afternoon, disguised as a re-

spectable old gentleman, and provided with a card bearing the name and address of "Lester Lawrence, Boston, Mass." Thad Burr called upon Sutter.

That gentleman received him with his accustomed graciousness, and the detective introduced the object of his call at once by asking Sutter whether he knew of any land for sale in the neighborhood.

"No," replied Sutter, smiling sweetly. "There may be plenty of it for aught I know. I never trouble myself about other people's business to know whether there is or not, however. If I wanted to purchase any, I should look about me, the same as other people do; but, so long as I do not, I do not bother my head with such things."

"You have chosen rather a strange place here," intimated his visitor.

"Do you think so?" with apparent surprise.

"It strikes me so."

"Well, that is what about everybody says, and even I do not particularly admire it. It was an idea of my wife. It was the only place in the whole country where she would consent to live."

"Indeed? Was that not a strange fancy? It's low situation, and therefore its unavoidable dampness must render it very unhealthy," Thad assumed.

"It is a trifle damp, that is a fact. I often tell my wife that if we had chosen a place higher up it would have been better. But she will hear nothing, for, strange to say, my wife, who has always been a delicate person, has come to be the picture of health since we moved here."

"Lie number one," mused the detective.

"By the way," pursued Sutter, before Thad had time to speak, "have you heard anything about the person who was injured by being thrown from his buggy up on the hill last night?"

"Only that he is dead."

"Dead?"

And the fellow affected great horror.

"Yes. He died, as I understand, about dark last evening."

"His fall must have been severe."

"Oh, it was not the fall that killed him," interposed Thad, watching the effect of his words upon the other; "the man was dead, in all probability, before he fell from the vehicle at all."

"You don't tell me?" with affected concern. "How came he to die, think you?"

"Poisoned."

"Poisoned? That is strange. But, of course, that is only a supposition—a theory?"

"Theory at first; fact, as now proved."

"They have held a post-mortem on him, then?"

"They have."

"This is very sad. I wonder how he could have received the deadly drug? Suicide, most likely."

"Murder, more likely."

"Indeed, but who could have administered it?"

"That remains to be determined."

Though watching the fellow's countenance with severe scrutiny, and, close student of human nature as he was, Thad could not detect the shadow of anything akin to agitation, remorse, or any other symptom of guilt.

"Rumor has it that the deceased stopped here a few minutes before the accident occurred," was added.

"So he did. And I thought then that the man looked ill; indeed, he complained of illness, and said he was chilly, and asked me for something to put over his knees, so I loaned him my lap-robe."

"He did not alight or ask for a drink of water, did he?"

"No; he did not get out of the buggy nor ask for anything, except what I tell you. Oh, yes, he did inquire the road to Flushing. That, indeed, was his excuse for stopping."

"Were you not a little averse to lending a total stranger your lap-robe?"

"Not at all. He had the appearance of being a gentleman; besides, if he never brought the robe back it would be but a trifling loss."

"You had never seen the young man before?"

"Never, to my knowledge."

At this point Hannah put her head in at

the door, and, catching her master's eye, beckoned to him in the same dictatorial fashion as on the previous occasion, to come out; whereupon, Sutter arose, excused himself from his visitor, and left the room.

The conversation between them this time appeared to be more animated than before, especially on the woman's side. Sutter could be heard in an apparently mollifying or supplicating tone, but the woman's voice indicated rebellion.

"I think, good Hannah," Sutter was heard to say, "that you might be mistaken. Let us not be too hasty."

"I tell you I am not mistaken. I am never mistaken in matters of this kind. I would know him in Jericho, and I tell you it is the same person. I saw him last night, and I cannot be mistaken in that walk."

"Sh-s-sh!" admonished Sutter. "Not so loud, please, good Hannah. He might be listening!"

"Let him listen, and much good may it do him! If you will let me have my way his listening will never do him any good nor anybody else any harm, I warn ye."

Then followed a good deal of talk in a subdued undertone, the nature of which the disguised shadower could only surmise.

At length Sutter appeared to have lost his patience, for he suddenly raised his voice to a higher pitch and spoke with severe emphasis:

"You will not have your way this time," he averred. "I know the proper time for harsh measures, and I do not propose to be coerced against my better judgment."

The woman retorted something in a mumbling manner, which Thad did not catch, to which Sutter replied:

"What do I care for her opinion? Less, as you well know, than that of anybody else."

The controversy soon ended, and, to Burr's surprise, the man rejoined him in the sitting-room with as placid a brow and as benign and smiling a countenance as if he had been having a tete-a-tete with his sweetheart.

Thad listened in vain for some allusion to the woman with whom he had had the altercation, but the man resumed his seat and at once revived the subject of the late tragedy.

"I hope and trust," he began, "that, if this poor fellow has been foully dealt with, the heartless assassin, whoever he may be, will be found. But the fact of his having been poisoned points, in my mind, to suicide. What was the nature of the drug?"

"Chloral hydrate."

"Ah! And the action of this drug is instantaneous, I believe?"

"It is, or nearly so."

"So it must have been administered a very short time before he was found."

"Not necessarily. The man might have been dead ten minutes before he was thrown from the vehicle, which, at the rate of speed at which the horse was going, might have carried him two or three miles."

For the first time Sutter's countenance underwent a visible change. There was marked indication of agitation, but the answer had been so unexpected that it produced a slightly startled expression.

"That, coupled with the absence of a vial or bottle, and the presence of another man's hat, precludes the theory of suicide."

"So it would seem," answered Sutter, submitting graciously.

There being nothing more to learn, as it seemed, Thad took his leave, somewhat disappointed with the result of an interview from which he had hoped at least to secure the shadow of a clue.

CHAPTER V.

IDENTIFICATION.

It had been Thad Burr's intention, on leaving Sutter, to proceed to New York, and visit the livery stable from which the horse had apparently been hired; but when he and his friend reached Flushing, whither Watson had driven him, the relatives of the dead man had already arrived and identified the body.

One of these was the dead man's brother, and from him the detective learned that the deceased's name was Orlando Howarth, that he belonged to a wealthy and well-connected New York family, and that he had left home on the day of the accident for the expressed purpose of calling upon some relatives, who resided a few miles beyond the place where the accident occurred.

"Had he any enemies in this part of the country that you know of?" interrogated Thad.

"No; nor any other part of the country, so far as I know," answered the brother, warmly. "I do not believe he had an enemy in the world, so far as that is concerned."

"Had he any great amount of money or other valuables on him, do you know?"

"He could not have had much money, and, as you perceive, his watch and other jewelry have not been touched."

"That is the strangest thing about it. While his watch and pin have been left on him, there was not one penny in money. He must have had some money."

"Yes, he ought to have had a little, but certainly not enough to induce anybody to murder him for it."

This was about all that could be learned in that direction, and the detective, having procured the address—or direction to, rather—of the country relatives whom the unfortunate young man had been visiting, set out early on the following day to pay them a visit.

But after all his pains there was little to be gleaned from these people. They told about the same story that the young man's brother had told.

One fact only was ascertained, and this was from an old aunt who did not appear to entertain a very high regard for her nephew.

"It's just 'bout's much as I expected Lany'd come to," she observed, after being told of his death. "He allus was a wild, un-go-to-meetin' boy, an' I allus expected he'd come to suthin' bad. W'y, while he was over heer t'other day he was drivin' round the kinty with one o' them acter women whut was stoppin' to 'Squire Harvey's, an' young men thet will do thet is no better than they orter be."

"Where is this actress now?" inquired Thad, interested at once.

"Lawdy, goodness knows. She may be in Halyfax, fer all I know, or keer. I'm sure she's powerful little good anywhere."

But here was the starter, and Thad Burr lost no time in making his way to the residence of Esquire Harvey's, where, he learned, a few choice summer boarders were entertained.

The actress in question, who was said to be a very beautiful woman, had been stopping at the house, but had, only the day previous, taken her departure for New York.

The young lady's name, he ascertained, was Miss Lydia Lemreaux, and, although an actress, was well connected and highly respectable.

Young Howarth had paid her a good deal of attention on the occasion of his several visits to this part of the country, which was about all the detective could learn in this direction.

He was fortunate enough to learn her city address, however, at the last moment, and by the merest accident, so he lost no time in getting back to Flushing and taking a train for the city.

The young lady, he found, lived in a respectable flat with her mother and two sisters, in Fifty-ninth street, not far from Columbus Avenue, and she appeared to be considerably stricken by the news of young Howarth's death.

This led the detective to surmise that the young couple had been betrothed, and he began, in a roundabout way, to ascertain the truth or falsity of the theory.

"You were very well acquainted with the young gentleman, were you not?"

"Yes; considering that we had known each other but a few months."

"Was there anything more than common friendship between you?"

"No; although we were very good friends indeed. Mr. Howarth had befriended me in many ways, and I trusted

him implicitly. You may know how thoroughly I trusted him when I tell you that I asked him to carry all my jewels to the city in his buggy rather than trust myself with them on the train."

"When was this?"

"The last time I saw him."

"Then he must have had your jewels with him at the time of his—of the accident?" faltered Thad, growing eager at the sight of a clew, as he imagined.

"Undoubtedly. By the way, sir, have you any idea what was done with them?"

"Not the slightest, although I believe it will be possible to trace them, and through them the murderer of Mr. Howarth."

"They were not on him when he was found, then?"

"No."

"Then he must have been murdered for my jewels."

"That is now my theory, miss."

"Oh, this is terrible!"

"It is, indeed. By the way, what was the nature of your jewels, Miss Lemreaux?"

"Why, there was a necklace of diamonds and pearls, a pair of diamond bracelets, a gold watch, studded with diamonds and rubies, the gift of—er—a diamond brooch, two pairs of ear-drops, diamonds, several rings—I don't remember how many."

"The collection was very valuable, then?"

"Yes; it was said to be next in value to that of Mrs. Langtry."

"Have you anything which would serve as a guide for me in tracing the jewels?"

"Why, yes," she said, rising. "I have a photograph of the whole collection which was taken for reproduction in one of the Sunday papers. Will that be of any value to you?"

"Just the thing," assured Thad.

She left him, and soon returned with a large photograph representing a magnificent collection of jewels, arranged upon a dark background.

"The very thing. With this I can identify the jewels anywhere. It is a most fortunate thing that the treasures were taken—"

"Sir?" she gasped, in astonishment.

"I mean that, inasmuch as the rascal, whoever he was, committed the more heinous offense, it was lucky that he combined robbery with it, as the nature of his booty will help to identify him."

"If he has not already disposed of them."

"There is little danger of that, I apprehend. These pieces are too conspicuous to permit a crook who understands his business to attempt to dispose of them in a hurry. There is a possibility that he may have disposed of them to a fence—"

"What is a fence?"

"A person who makes a business of receiving stolen goods."

"Ah, I see. Well, suppose he has disposed of my jewels in that way?"

"It will entail a little more trouble in finding them, that is all."

"Still, you think they can be found?"

"Not the least doubt of it."

"Oh, if you do find them, sir," she cried, rapturously, "you shall have five thousand dollars for your trouble!"

"No, I thank you, Miss Lemreaux; I am paid for my work."

"But you will allow me to make you a present, just to show my gratitude, won't you?"

"If it will be any satisfaction to you, I certainly cannot object."

Armed with this unexpected clew, Thad felt that he had made some progress in his case, and went home for a night's rest before proceeding with it.

The following morning he returned to the house of his friend Watson, which he had settled upon as his headquarters while working upon the case.

He had long since concluded in his own mind that the secret of the murder and robbery would be found at the mysterious house at the edge of the swamp, and therefore determined to begin work from that point.

Reaching his friend's house, he at once disguised himself as an English tourist and put off to visit Sutter, and just as he

emerged from the front gate, Thad espied the young man, Tom Gillam, striding away down the hill in the direction of the house in the swamp.

The great crook shadower was on this trail in an instant, and, reaching the foot of the hill, he saw Tom enter the inclosure by way of the opening where the clump of bushes grew.

The detective hurried to the stone wall and slipped into the clump of shrubbery from which he could watch Tom's movements.

The latter hurried along until he reached the house, but, instead of entering it from the front, passed round to the back, and disappeared.

Thad then left cover, and passing along the wall to the stile, crossed it and walked boldly to the house.

Inquiring for Sutter, the maid who came to the door informed him that that gentleman was away from home and was not expected to return before the following day.

Compelled to accept this statement as truth, the detective retraced his steps to the main road, but not to leave the premises, for he crept along the wall to the clump of shrubbery, and there again concealed himself to await the return of Tom Gillam.

But Tom evidently was too sharp to be caught, for, although Thad waited until almost sundown, the young man failed to put in an appearance.

The detective, therefore, abandoned his vigil and wended his way up the hill, but as he was passing the stable yard, Thad was attracted by the sound of whistling in a shrill key, and, looking in the direction, espied Mr. Tom busily engaged with some work about the yard, to all appearances, the most unconcerned individual in the world.

This meant business for the shadower, and quickly opening the gate leading into the stable yard before the young man was aware of it, Thad was at his side.

Tom started and turned a shade pale at sight of the stranger so close upon him.

"W'y, sir, you skeered me a'most to death," he averred, with a forced laugh.

"No doubt of it," responded Thad, dryly. "Guilty people are easily frightened. They run from their own shadows sometimes. By the way, what were you doing down at the house in the swamp a while ago?"

CHAPTER VI.

A PUZZLING EPISTLE.

Tom Gillam was too much stunned by the question to answer at once, and stood staring, open-mouthed, at his questioner.

"Have you no tongue?" demanded the detective, sternly. "Why do you not answer my question?"

But Tom was still unable to find his speech, and Thad took him roughly by the shoulder and shook him, with the command:

"Now, speak, sir, or I will shake it out of you. What were you doing at that house under the hill?"

"Nothin', sir," the fellow finally asserted, with chattering teeth.

"Why did you go down there and sneak in the side way like a thief?"

"'Cause I didn't want the boss ter see me, sir."

"But what did you go there for, anyway?"

"Nothin'; only to see a person."

"Who is the person?"

Tom grew very red, and finally stammered:

"The maid, sir."

"What is the maid's name?"

"Bettie, sir."

"You are sure it is not Hannah?"

In spite of his fright and agitation Tom could not avoid laughter at this suggestion.

"No, sir, it wa'n't Hannah. I dun'no' who'd go to see her. W'y, she's old and ugly enough for the old boy's grandmother."

Thad was somewhat put out at this sally. For the life of him he could not believe the fellow guilty of any wrong-doing. His whole appearance and bearing belied such a theory.

"You are sure you did not go down there to carry any news, are you?" resumed Thad.

"News? What news, sir?"

"Any news. About the arrival of anybody at the house here?"

"No, sir."

"And you are sure that you did not carry any word down there last Thursday?"

"No, sir, I didn't."

"And yet, as to-day, you preceded me down there, and when I arrived Hannah already knew that I was to come."

This mystified Tom the more, and he stared in greater bewilderment than ever.

"Was you down thar' Thursday, sir?" he could but ask.

"I was."

"Funny I didn't see yer. I seen one gentleman—an old feller—but I didn't see you."

Which satisfied Thad on one point—that Tom had not penetrated his disguise.

"Now, Tom," began Thad, looking the boy straight in the eye, "do you recall anything that happened on Wednesday night?"

"Nothin' 'cept the young man what was throwed outen his buggy dyin'."

"Jog your memory! Do you not recall conversing with old Hannah just inside the inclosure where the clump of sumachs hide the opening in the wall?"

Tom stared at him in unfeigned astonishment.

"No, sir; don't remember that."

"Do you mean to tell me that you were not talking to old Hannah there on Wednesday night—the night the stranger died at the house—and, after talking for a long time, you and she took up a valise, which appeared to be pretty heavy, and carried it between you to the house?"

"No, sir; it wasn't me," asserted Tom, with as honest a face as was ever worn by a human being.

Thad was puzzled. It seemed impossible that there should be two persons so nearly alike as Tom Gillam and the man he had seen in company with old Hannah that night.

The detective concluded to let the matter drop for the present, but determined to watch Tom very closely.

To that end, disguising himself as a farm laborer, about eight o'clock that night Thad sought the clump of sumachs, and once more concealed himself among the bushes.

The night was more favorable for the enterprise than the previous one had been, being cloudy and dark, and, after a long wait, the sound of footsteps coming from that direction rewarded his patience. Soon the person came up, and proved to be a woman—a small, slender woman, that certainly was not Hannah, and, never having seen Bettie, the maid, of whom Tom had spoken, he decided that it must be she.

The woman tripped lightly to the opening, pushed her way through, and when on the outside, stopped and peered about in the darkness for some moments.

At length she appeared to be satisfied, for, dodging back into the bushes, she stopped on reaching the stone wall, took something from her bosom, and placing it in a crevice, she tripped away as lightly as she had come.

The detective, now all alert, recovered the object, which proved to be a paper folded into a small square. This he put, at once, into his pocket, with a view to reading it on his return to the house, but before going decided to pay another visit to the mysterious house.

But this move was arrested by the sound of footsteps, this time from the outside.

A moment later he felt, rather than saw, some one enter the clump of bushes not a yard away from him, and realized at once that it was a man.

"It is the lover after his note," chuckled Thad.

And he was not mistaken so far as the man being after the note was concerned, for, no sooner had he reached the point in the wall where the woman had deposited the note, than he began fumbling about in search of something.

Not finding what he sought, the person uttered several anathemas; but, not satis-

fied, he struck a match to light him in his further search.

Along the side of the rough wall he peered by the light of the match, then down to the ground, until the match burned itself out.

Still unsatisfied, he lighted a second match, and as its flame flared up, he so turned that Thad had a good view of his face.

To the detective's great surprise it was neither Tom Gillam nor anybody else whom he had ever seen.

He was a young man of rather refined appearance, although clad in the rough raiment of the farm laborer.

After striking four or five matches and still being unsuccessful in his search, the young man turned away, grumbling and cursing, and strode off in the direction of the road.

As Thad peered out and strained his eyes in the hope of ascertaining which way the man had gone, he discovered what he had not seen before, a buggy standing in the road.

Into this the young man climbed, but, instead of driving off at once, began a discussion with some one else who had evidently been sitting in the vehicle all this time.

The discussion grew pretty warm, once or twice, but, strain his ears as he would, the detective was unable to catch the drift of the conversation.

At length he decided to venture out with a view of getting nearer the speakers, but emerged from the bushes just as one of the men in the buggy whipped up the horse, and off they rolled up the hill, at a lively pace.

Burr was satisfied now that the note in his possession was of weightier import than a mere love letter, and was correspondingly anxious to get somewhere where he could read it; so he left his hiding place and hastened up the hill to his friend's house, and was a trifle surprised to find a buggy standing in front of the gate.

The occupants evidently had gone into the house, so Thad, not wishing to present himself to his friend and his family in his present garb, went directly to his own room, and, hastily lighting a lamp, took out the note and perused it.

It was written in a strong feminine hand and ran as follows:

Dear Ned—Next Thursday night without fail. It will be a brilliant gathering—all the swells of the neighborhood and a good many more from N. Y. It will be a dead * * * * * for us if we take care of it. Don't fail, under any circumstances. You know how to manage, so I leave all to you. Bob will be at the usual place, so you can depend on him. By the way, last play a gem. Couldn't be beaten, and in keeping with your consummate skill. Do as well this time, and retain your laurels. Sincerely,

"ROSEBUD."

The great crook hunter puzzled over this mysterious note more than ever he had done over anything of a like character before.

That there was something dark and mysterious behind it—that, indeed, it was a notice of some robbery or something of the kind—he had not the least doubt. But of where the affair was to take place, or who the parties were who were to take part in it, there was not the slightest clew.

At length he concluded to dress and go down and have a talk with his friend Watson with regard to the matter.

It was close upon eleven o'clock when he descended the stairs, and he was apprised by talking and laughter in the hall that his friend's visitors were on the point of going.

A curiosity to see what the visitors were like prompted the shadower to hasten down the stairs, and he was just in time to catch a good view of the visitors' faces as they turned to pass out of the front door.

One was a middle-aged, gray-haired man whom he had never seen before; the other was the identical young man whom he had seen in the clump of bushes, only he had exchanged his clothes!

CHAPTER VII.

STRANGE COMPLICATIONS.

It is uncertain whether the stranger recognized Thad or not.

It is hardly likely that he could have done so, but he evidently believed he had seen the detective at some time and place, for as he passed out of the door, and while bidding Watson an effusive farewell, he bestowed a glare upon Thad that the latter was not likely to forget soon.

Watson, who had noticed nothing of this and was always profuse in his hospitality, was about to call the strangers back in order to introduce them to Burr, but the younger man, who was behind, closed the door with such surprising abruptness as to deter the host from his purpose.

He must have seen there was something unusual, however, for when he turned to Thad and saw him still standing with his eyes fixed on the door and a strange, puzzled expression on his face, he was very much puzzled himself, and after gazing at his friend for a minute or so, asked:

"Why, what's the matter, Thad? Do you know those gentlemen?"

Thad turned and surveyed his friend for some seconds before speaking, and then asked:

"Who are those men, Matt?"
 "A couple of very dear friends of mine."
 "Friends, eh?" said Burr, half musingly.

"Yes. Have you seen them before?"
 "Only one of them, the younger man."

"Ah! it is too bad you didn't come down sooner. It might have been pleasant for you to have renewed your acquaintance."

"Very pleasant, I have no doubt, although it is hardly likely the young man would have recognized me."

"How so? From the way he looked at you I should say he might."

"Yes, he looked at me as if he might have seen me before, but on the only occasion on which I ever saw him, to my knowledge, I am quite positive that he did not see me."

"That is strange. Why, when did you see him before?"

"This evening."
 "Oh, I see; you saw him as he was driving along the road?"

"Not at all. Come inside, and I will tell you all about it."

The two men entered the sitting room and seated themselves, and then Thad related in detail the circumstances of the adventure at the clump of sumachs by the stone wall, and concluded by handing his friend the note he had taken from the crevice in the wall.

Watson's face was a picture of surprise, but he only arched his brows and took the note to read.

As he read along his brows became knit with perplexity, and when he had read to the end he looked up at the detective with an inquiring expression.

But before he had time to speak Thad inquired:

"Well, what do you make of it?"
 "I'll be hanged if I know what to make of it? Do you say this was put into the stone wall by a woman?"

"It was, if I am any judge of the sex."
 "And Lemreaux was there looking for it?"

Thad almost bounded out of his chair.
 "Lemreaux, you say his name is?" he demanded.

"Yes. Why?"
 "How long have you known him?"

"Oh, for two or three years, I guess."
 "What do you know about him?"

"Not much, except that he is a capital fellow, always has plenty of money, and moves in very good society."

"Do you know his family?"
 "No; although I have heard a good deal about them."

"Has he a sister?"
 "I believe he has—two or three of them."

"Is one of them on the stage?"
 "Now that you mention it, I believe

one of them is an actress. But what are you driving at, old man?"

"Nothing, only Howarth, the young man that was killed, had in his possession at the time of the tragedy, or a short time before, a set of jewels belonging to a young woman, an actress, by the name of Lemreaux, and from what you say I should judge that she is this chap's sister."

"The murdered man had her jewels at the time he was killed?" cried Watson, in great astonishment.

"He had them a short time before he was killed. I cannot tell how long before."

"Then he was robbed as well as murdered?"

"There is no doubt of that."

"And that was the probable incentive?"

"Undoubtedly."

"I wonder—"

Here Watson broke off and set to examining the note again. At length he drawled:

"See here, Thad, this thing is too complex for me to quite get it through my head, but I suppose your detective noddle permits you to look a long way into this matter and to see things that nobody else can. I suppose you see some connection between this fellow's sister losing her diamonds, the young man losing his life and this note."

"There would seem to be a vague connection. What connection there is, remains to be found out."

"What do you infer this note to mean?"

"I will answer that question by asking another. Do you know of any fete or reception which is to take place among the elite of the neighborhood on next Thursday?"

"Yes, the Cartrights, who live about a mile from here, are to give a reception in honor of their daughter, who has just returned from Paris, where she has been at school."

"I suppose it will be a very swell affair?"

"I presume so, though I never take any interest in such things myself."

"There will probably be a good deal of wealth represented there, at all events?"

"I shouldn't wonder."

"Well, do you see no connection between the affair and this note, then?"

"By George! There does seem to be a connection. You infer that this was written by one confederate to notify another that the affair was to come off at such a time, so that the latter might be there with a view to relieving the ladies of their jewels? Am I right?"

"Well, you did come very near staggering into the light, after all, didn't you?"

"And you infer that this young man, Lemreaux, is probably implicated in the proposed robbery?"

"If he is not, he is keeping rather questionable company, I should say."

"This is terrible!" groaned Watson.

"You would not have believed it possible of him, eh?"

"No, I could not. But one does not know whom to trust nowadays. I considered this young man one of the most upright and honorable persons I had ever met. But this shows him to be a thief, and probably a murderer. My God! If your theory is correct, he has been implicated in robbing his own sister!"

"That is the way it looks now."

"What course do you propose to pursue in the matter of this reception?"

"I shall be there. It may lead to the discovery of the perpetrators of this other crime."

"But may not the interception of this note thwart the plans of these rascals?"

"It may to a certain extent, but they are not the sharpers I take them to be if they do not succeed in devising some other means of communication."

"The fact that this note came from some one on Sutter's premises would seem to indicate that he was cognizant of what was going on, would it not?"

"Yes, unless he is the dullest individual in the universe. But it hardly seems possible that a man should have such

things going on under his very nose without knowing something about it."

"It does seem unlikely."

"By the way, that Tom Gillam of yours is a strange chap."

Watson started and looked at his friend in surprise.

"What do you mean?"

"I do not know what to make of him."

"In what way?"

"He is a medley."

"Still, Tom is perfectly honest."

"Perhaps. His looks and conversation would indicate as much, but I have seen things about him that have led me to wonder whether he is all that he seems."

"I do not understand you."

"Well, you remember the hat incident?"

The doctor colored a trifle for some reason, and laughingly replied:

"Yes, but the boy explained that to the satisfaction of both of us, didn't he?"

"It might have been to your satisfaction, but certainly not to mine. He did no more than deny any knowledge of how his hat came there. But there are other things which are of more importance than the hat business."

Thad then went on to relate the incident of the young man putting off to Sutter's on the two occasions of the detective's visit; of his meeting with old Hannah at the clump of sumachs, and finally of his being seen in company with Hannah carrying the heavy valise.

"Did you see all this?" demanded the doctor, growing confused.

"I certainly did."

"Might not it have been some one bearing a strong resemblance to Tom? You admit that it was very dark."

"No, I am almost positive that I could not have been mistaken. No, on the night on which I saw them with the valise it was not dark. At the particular time at which I recognized him, in fact, the moon shone unusually bright."

"Why don't you speak to the boy himself, about it?"

"So I have."

"What did he say?"

"Just what he did when we accosted him about the hat—denied all knowledge of the affair."

"Then I should be inclined to believe him."

"How long have you had the fellow with you?"

"About a year, now."

"And you have always found him truthful?"

"Always. I have never found him in an untruth yet."

It was after midnight and Thad arose to go to bed. As he bade his friend good-night, he said:

"I hope your estimation of this young man is correct, but I am more deceived than I have ever been in my life if it is."

When Thad reached his room he threw open the curtains of the window, which looked out upon the lawn.

The sky had cleared and the moon was shining gloriously. As he gazed out upon the well-kept garden, he was surprised at seeing two figures, partly concealed in the shadow of a clump of shrubbery.

CHAPTER VIII.

A LIVELY CHASE.

Thad felt certain that the men in the yard were not there for any good, and determined to ascertain who they were and what their business was.

His first impulse was to go down and notify his friend what he had seen, but upon second thought he concluded to go alone.

Slipping into the hall he glided silently down-stairs, and was soon in the yard.

The lights had all been turned out and to all appearances the household had retired, so that he had no trouble in leaving the house without observation.

Gliding round to the corner of the house, he peered cautiously around and saw that the two figures were still there.

But as the space between him and the men was open and brilliantly illumined by the moon, the trouble was to approach them without being seen.

Then a happy thought occurred to him. A few paces beyond where the men were standing was the stable.

If he could reach the road without observation, he might go beyond the stable, re-enter the lot at that point and come upon the men from the opposite direction.

Stealing along softly he succeeded in gaining the road, walked some distance along it past the stable, found a hole in the hedge and crawled through.

Keeping in the shadow of the stable, the detective succeeded in reaching another hedge-row, which ran at the back of the yard.

He crept along this for some distance, until he had placed the clump of bushes beside which the men were standing between him and them, after which his task was easy.

He had only to steal cautiously along until he was on the opposite side of the clump and only a few feet from the men.

Here he crouched down and listened. He was not long in discovering who the parties were.

One of them was Tom Gillam and the other Horace Lemreaux, the young man who had left the house but half an hour or so before.

They were talking excitedly, and the detective had no trouble in overhearing what they said.

"I'm sure she put it thar'," Tom was heard to say, for I seen her write it and start off with it. An' then when she come back she told me she'd waited fer ye a long time, an' when ye didn't come, she stuck it in the crevice in the wall."

"She may have thought she did," growled the other, ill-naturedly; "but if she had, I should certainly have found it."

"Mebby it fell down."

"No, I lighted a match and looked all about."

A short silence ensued, and then Tom suddenly exclaimed:

"Great Jingo!"

"What is it?" demanded the other, apprehensively.

"I hev' it."

"Well?"

"Thet stranger thet's hangin' 'bout here."

"Well, what about him?"

"He's up to sumpin', an' I'll bet he was nosing 'bout an' got the note."

"Nonsense! What would he want with it?"

"I dun'no', but ever sence the 'accident' he's been nosing 'bout, sometimes fixed up like an old man an' sometimes like a young dude, an' I'll bet he's a detective."

"That is the chap I saw in the house to-night, I suppose?"

"Big feller, smooth face, looks somethin' like an actor?"

"Yes."

"Thet's him."

"Has the old man tumbled to him, do you suppose?"

"I dun'no'. I should think so, though. They're thicker'n three in a bed an' one in the middle."

This set Thad to thinking. Who could the "old man" be?

It could not be possible that his friend was into the plot with these rascals?

And yet, now that he recalled the fact, he remembered that Watson had persisted in exonerating Tom Gillam against all reason.

The thought gave the detective a shudder, and he recalled the words of his friend when he said that "we did not know whom to trust these days."

At this juncture Thad chanced to glance toward the house, when he beheld Watson coming toward the men on the other side of the bushes.

This confirmed his suspicions and the cold perspiration started upon his brow.

The very thought of his old friend, whom he had known for so many years, being in league with these murderers and robbers made him sick at heart.

But, he thought, he would wait and see. Watson would soon be with them, and he would then ascertain the facts.

But the conclusion had hardly come to him when the two men appeared to catch sight of the doctor for the first time, and,

uttering an exclamation of surprise and disgust, they broke around the bushes and came plump against Thad.

With a muttered oath the two men turned and ran across a small open space to the hedge and leaped over like a couple of deer.

Thad hesitated for nothing, but put after them with all the speed he possessed, leaped the hedge as nimbly as they had done, and was soon bounding along the road at a break-neck gait.

Down the hill the two men bounded at a furious rate, the detective gaining upon them every second.

At length they reached the opening in the stone wall at the clump of sumachs and darted through.

In an instant Thad was through also, and then came a lively race across the stretch of open ground between there and the house.

Thad had but one thing to fear.

If Sutter should be in sympathy with these rascals, and if he and his dog, or both, should come out and head him off, his game would be up.

But no such opposition presented itself, and he dashed on.

As the two men neared the house they veered their course and made direct for the swamp.

This was a great surprise for Thad, for it was not possible that they could ford this dreadful miasma. But the men kept straight on, and a few minutes later they were splashing through the water, first half-knee deep, then knee deep, and finally up to their armpits, and then they became obscured in the shadow of the thick growth of willows and were lost to view.

Thad had ventured no further than the edge of the swamp, however, and paused.

He had had enough of the swamp on the first night of his visit.

As he paused he chanced to glance about him, when, to his great surprise, he found his friend Watson at his side, puffing and blowing from his recent race.

"Lost them after all," commented Watson, between puffs.

Burr regarded him in silence for a moment, and then he asked:

"Do you know who those men were?"

"I haven't the slightest idea," returned Watson, calmly. "Who were they?"

"Well, sir, if you really do not know, one of them was your friend Lemreaux, and the other Tom Gillam, whose honesty you were so ready to vouch for."

"It cannot be possible!" exclaimed Watson, in great astonishment.

"It is true, nevertheless."

"My dear friend Burr, I am not the man either to dispute your word or doubt your judgment. I know you too well for either. But if that was my boy, Tom Gillam, we can soon prove it. Come."

And he turned upon his heel and started back toward the road.

Thad followed in silence, wondering by what process his friend was going to prove Tom Gillam's innocence.

After a sharp walk of ten minutes or so, they gained the top of the hill, and without a word Watson turned into the stable-yard.

Burr followed, still at a loss to know what his friend was up to, and finally saw him enter the carriage-house in connection with the stable.

It was excessively dark in here, and the doctor lighted a match and at once mounted a flight of rude steps which led to a floor or loft above the stables.

Thad kept at his heels, and soon the doctor reached the landing and Thad heard him open a door.

"Tom!" he heard him call. "Tom! Are you here?"

"Yes, sir," came a drowsy voice.

"Well, stir about and strike a light, and be quick about it."

By this time the detective was at the doctor's side, and the next moment a match flared up in the darkness in the depths of the room at the door of which they were standing, and presently Thad saw the match applied to the wick of a stump of a candle, which gradually took fire.

As the light grew stronger the detective cast his eyes about the rude apartment, and saw a bed, tumbled as if some one had just got up out of it, a couple of soap boxes, which evidently did service as seats, and another larger goods box, which served as a table, and which was littered with a deck of greasy playing cards, and on which stood the candle which Tom had just lighted.

The young man was in his night-clothes and bore every appearance of having been asleep.

"How long have you been in, Tom?" questioned Watson.

"I dun'no," muttered the boy, rubbing his sleepy eyes.

"What time did you go to bed?"

"'Bout eight, sir."

"And you haven't been out since?"

"No, sir."

"You are quite sure of this?"

"Not 'nless I walked in my sleep, sir," he said, with a half chuckle.

Watson turned to Thad, who stood staring at the young man with a countenance full of wonder.

"Was not that you in the yard a little while ago," interposed the detective, "talking to young Lemreaux?"

"No, sir," was the drawling reply.

Watson, meanwhile, had never removed his eyes from Thad's face. The latter was too much dumfounded by what he had seen to proceed any further, and turned away with the evident intention of quitting the place, but his friend interrupted him with:

"Well, old man, what do you think?"

"I have no more to say," he replied, dryly, and proceeded down the stairs.

But by the time he had reached the open air he had recovered his good humor, and when his friend came up with him, grasped him by the hand, burst into a hearty laugh, and said:

"Forgive me, my friend, for my suspicions, but this is the most remarkable case I ever ran across. I would have taken my oath that the man whom I saw in the yard talking to young Lemreaux was Tom."

"But you are satisfied now that it was not, are you not?"

"I am compelled to be, and yet I cannot understand it."

"It is also possible, is it not, that you might have been mistaken with regard to seeing him in conversation with old Hannah?"

"As it turns out that I was mistaken this time, it is just as likely that I was mistaken before. But it beats everything I ever experienced. By the way, is there anybody in the neighborhood who bears a resemblance to Tom?"

"Not that I am aware of."

"Well, by Jove!" murmured Thad, more perplexed than he had ever been in his life. "If this keeps on I shall lose my wits. But I'll sift it to the bottom, or die in the attempt."

"And win," said his friend, encouragingly.

CHAPTER IX.

A FEW MISSING GEMS.

Little of interest transpired for the succeeding four days—that is, from Saturday, the day on which Thad had the chase after the two men, and Cartright's reception on the following Thursday evening.

Thad kept watch upon Tom Gillam's movements and paid frequent clandestine visits to the house under the hill, but nothing new had been developed.

Through the influence of his friend, the doctor, the detective had got himself invited to the reception under the name and title and in the guise of Lord Slobberton, an English nobleman.

Of course he was the center of attraction, especially among the ladies, but he took less interest in the swell element present than he did in looking for certain persons whom he expected to be there.

But the persons whom he looked for did not appear.

In vain did the detective scan each face, not only of the guests, but of the valets and other attendants, in the hope of recog-

nizing some of the gang of robbers who had promised to be on hand.

Finally, toward the close of the reception he came to the conclusion that the plot had failed, and from that on he became less vigilant.

And then, just before the final breaking up, there was an alarm given out that some of the ladies had been despoiled of their gems.

In fact, not less than half a dozen women had been robbed, the total loss of precious stones mounting up into the thousands.

The most intense excitement prevailed.

Finally it was decided to search all the servants, which was accordingly done, but to no purpose.

Nothing was found on any of them, and the mystery remained as profound as ever.

Thad was considerably crestfallen over the affair, although he had divulged his identity to no one.

He was deeply chagrined to think that his mission had been such a complete failure, to think that, while his purpose in attending the fete was to prevent the intended robbery and gain some clew to the former crime at the same time, he had failed in both.

While he had been accompanied by his friend, Doctor Watson, they had seen little of each other during the levee, the doctor throwing himself into the enjoyment of the occasion, and the detective having his mind upon other matters.

When they got into their buggy to return, therefore, the two men were in quite different moods, the doctor lively and full of spirits, and the detective dull, preoccupied, and almost morose.

The doctor talked glibly along, made jokes on this and that, and interspersed his chat with frequent peals of laughter, but Thad could not be drawn out.

At length the doctor asked:

"What is the matter to-night, old fellow? You are as glum as an oyster."

"Truth is, Matt, I do not feel in the gayest of moods. One is rarely jubilant over one's own defeat."

"Then you admit that you have been defeated, do you?"

It was as much as he could do to refrain from bursting forth and expressing his opinion in a manner that must have caused his friend to writhe, but with a heroic effort he restrained himself, and merely answered:

"Yes; there is no use of denying the fact. These scoundrels, whoever they may be, are too many for me—at least, they were to-night. But, never mind. I shall pay them, and with good interest, yet."

"I hope so. By the way, you did not see my friend Lemreaux there, did you?"

"No; I am sorry to say."

"And yet, mightn't he have been there for all that?"

"What do you mean?" demanded the detective, startled by the insinuation.

"Oh, nothing. He probably wasn't there; only I asked if, in your opinion, it was not barely possible that he might have been there."

"I do not believe it possible."

But when he glanced at his friend's face at this moment, which he could plainly discern in the moonlight, and beheld an expression which he could interpret as nothing less than sarcasm, Thad hastened to ask:

"What is your opinion?"

"Oh, I have no reason for believing he was there. Although I am not clever at penetrating disguises like yourself. Besides, having my mind upon pleasure, instead of that of detecting individuals, it would not have been difficult to deceive me anyway."

This speech, delivered in the flippant manner it was, exasperated the detective more than ever, but still he held his peace. Presently the doctor went on.

"There is one point we may be sure of anyway."

"What is that?"

"Tom Gillam wasn't there."

There was a vein of such undisguised sarcasm in this that Thad could not help but retort:

"Perhaps you can best tell me whether he was there or not, Matt."

"Pardon me, my dear friend Burr. I see you are a trifle piqued at my quizzing. I assure you that my estimate of you as a detective is none the less exalted on account of your failure in this matter. So far as my knowing whether Tom Gillam was there or not, I know no more than yourself. I was unwilling to believe that it was he you had seen in the yard the other night, still I was willing to test the question, which we did, to the complete exoneration of the boy. If you have any suspicion that he was there to-night, we will demonstrate the question in the same manner we did before, or any other you may suggest."

His whole manner had suddenly changed, and Thad felt that he had misjudged his friend, but instead of offering any apology for his words and actions, he merely said:

"Very well, we shall test the matter on our return, although on the present occasion it may not prove so successful."

"How so?"

"Supposing Tom to have been implicated in this robbery, as it took place nearly an hour before we left, he will have had abundant time to get home and to bed ere we reach there."

"But is there not some other method of proving the case?"

"I do not know. Perhaps."

Within the last fifteen or twenty minutes a wonderful change had taken place in the elements.

The sky, which had been clear and cloudless when they started from the Cartright mansion, had become overcast, the wind had risen, and frequent vivid flashes of lightning illuminated the darkness for brief intervals.

The two men had entered a wood, and the darkness was intense.

Just at the point in their conversation above recorded, the sound of wheels was heard coming on behind them.

The approaching vehicle was traveling at a much more rapid pace than our friends', and in a short time was alongside.

At the near approach of the vehicle Watson instinctively turned out of the road to give it room to pass, for, dark as it was, the other driver dashed on without apparent care for consequences.

Just as the vehicle was alongside of Watson's, the occupants, who appeared to be somewhat under the influence of liquor, hurled some coarse epithet at our friends, and just at that instant there came an unusually brilliant flash of lightning.

It lighted up the faces of the occupants of the other buggy, and Thad and Watson had no trouble in recognizing them.

They were Horace Lemreaux and Tom Gillam!

They evidently recognized Watson, at least, for the next instant they put the lash to their horse and dashed away.

It had all occurred so suddenly that Thad had had no time for action, or scarcely thought, and now that they had dashed on, the road was too dark to think of attempting to overtake them.

A brief silence ensued between the two friends, and then Burr observed, with an indifferent air:

"I guess that incident saves us the trouble of the test."

"What do you mean?" demanded Watson.

"Well, it proves the matter about which we were in doubt."

"It only proves that these two boys have been out for a drive, but it does not prove where they have been."

"It is easy enough to imagine where they have been, after what I heard between them the other night."

"Then you still stick to the theory that the man you saw in the yard with Lemreaux was Tom Gillam?"

"Either it was he in the yard that night or this was not he."

"You are not positive that this was he, then?"

"Under the circumstances, no. If the party whom I saw in the yard that night was some fellow who bears a striking resemblance to Tom, then this may be the same person. What do you think in the present case? Do you believe the fellow in the buggy was Tom Gillam or not?"

"No more than it was yourself, Thad," he said. "I admit that there is a strong resemblance, but I should not be deceived into mistaking this fellow for Tom."

Thad was silent. This was a direct thrust at what he considered his strongest point—namely, the ability to remember and detect faces, even through the most clever disguises, and he remained silent.

A few minutes later they were driving past Sutter's house, and, although it was now nearly two in the morning, there was a horse and buggy standing at the fence.

Watson either did not, or affected not, to see them, until Burr called his attention to them.

Then he reined up, glanced back at the buggy, which could barely be made out in the darkness, and at last remarked very coolly:

"I suppose Sutter's wife has taken worse. That is Dr. Chapel's rig."

But Thad was not satisfied that this statement was strictly true, and as soon as they reached the top of the hill he suggested:

"Had we not better go up and see if Tom has gone to bed yet?"

Watson turned on him with a sarcastic sort of rippling laugh, and asked:

"Oh, aren't you satisfied on that point yet?"

"Not by any means," replied Thad, firmly.

"Oh, very well, then. Come on, and we shall investigate this case until you are thoroughly convinced."

They drove into the stable yard, alighted, and the doctor hitched the horse to a post, and then went in to arouse old Ben, an ancient negro who slept in the rear of the carriage house, to come out and take charge of the horse.

When this had been attended to the doctor said:

"Come, Thad; now for the investigation."

And he straightway began climbing the rude stairs, without a light this time, and Thad followed.

When Watson reached the door and opened it, he began calling for Tom, as before, but a dozen calls did not have the effect of eliciting any response.

By this time the doctor was thoroughly out of patience, and, pushing on into the room, took a match from his pocket and lighted it.

As the flame flared up, he held it above his head and surveyed the room.

There were the same objects which Thad saw on the previous visit, and there was the bed, but this time it showed no signs of having been slept in, and, what was more to the point, no Tom Gillam was visible.

Thad could not suppress a smile as the defeated doctor turned, with a white, questioning face toward him.

"Well, he isn't there, eh, Matt?" said Thad, with a chuckle.

"The infernal idiot!" growled the doctor, and, turning, pushed out of the room.

CHAPTER X.

SUSPICIOUS INDICATIONS.

Watson did not pause till he reached the ground, and Thad followed at a respectful distance.

The doctor appeared on the point of pushing right on to the house, when the detective caused him to halt by saying:

"I say, Matt, hadn't we better find out where that fellow is?"

Watson paused, turned about with clouded brow, was about to make some angry retort, apparently, but quickly mastered his feelings, smiled feebly, and said:

"Just as you say, Thad. But where the deuce shall we go to look for the scamp?"

Thad jerked his head in the direction of the house under the hill, and said:

"Do you think he would be very far from there?"

"It is the last place I should think of going for him. He never goes about that place."

"Ah, but I know better than that, Matt. He confessed to me that he went down there to see the maid, Bettie."

Watson's attitude changed instantly. He

gave vent to a light laugh, and then said, jokingly:

"Oh, well, possibly the boy does sometimes go down there for that. Boys will be boys, you know."

"But do you think that he would be there at this time in the morning for that?"

The doctor grew suddenly serious again. "No, certainly not. And for that reason I am positive he is not down there."

"At all events it would not be a bad idea to watch here for him to come in and demand where he has been."

"You may do that if you like. I am going to bed."

"Very well, Matt. You go to bed and I'll remain here and watch. There is no such thing as sleep for me until I see whether that fellow comes in or not, and if he does come in I shall use my best endeavors to ascertain where he has been, and whether or not it was he in the buggy with young Lemreaux."

"Do as you please."

And, turning upon his heel, the doctor walked away.

Thad was sorely perplexed, and filled with suspicion.

What could be the meaning of his friend's conduct?

And then he asked himself again if it was possible that his friend of so many years was mixed up with these rascals.

As he listened, half-abstractedly, it seemed to him that he heard footsteps diverge from the direction of the house and tend toward the front gate.

As he continued to listen, he heard the gate open and close, and then heard the footsteps tending down the road in the direction of the hill.

It was futile to longer attempt to smother his suspicion. His worst apprehensions were well-founded, he no longer had any doubt about the perfidy of his friend, and his feelings of friendship suddenly changed to the loathing and detestation he felt for all thieves in common.

Determined, therefore, to detect this hypocritic friend in his rascality and face him in it, he decided to follow him.

Gliding with a noiseless step to the hedge that bordered the road, he listened until the footsteps had passed, and then slipped into the road.

The night by this time was intensely dark—a most excellent occasion for the occupation of shadowing.

The doctor kept on down the hill, and when the bottom was reached, turned off to the right and proceeded to the familiar clump of sumachs at the opening in the wall.

Thad glided along behind him, and as soon as he heard Watson's footsteps proceeding toward the mysterious house, he slipped into the bushes and concealed himself.

He considered it the better plan to wait here, as his man would in all probability return that way—than attempting to follow him.

Half an hour passed, and still there was no sight or sound of his friend, and then it occurred to the detective to ascertain whether or not the buggy was still standing at the stile.

For this purpose he walked along the stone wall until he came to the stile, and, as he had more than half expected, found the vehicle gone.

He then hurried back to the clump of bushes, and for another long spell thereafter waited for the return of the doctor.

Thus more than an hour elapsed, and still he did not appear.

At length he concluded to wait no longer and crossed the lot in the direction of the house.

The place was in total darkness, so far as a front or end view revealed, and he again walked to the rear, wading in water half knee-deep as before.

As on the previous occasion, there was a light streaming from some aperture in the roof, and which was the only light visible about the place.

He looked in vain for any appearance of the woman he had before seen at the window. Everything was dark in that quarter, so he decided to carry out his former

project of climbing the tree which stood against the house, with a view to investigating the mystery of the light in the roof.

Thad found it no light matter to climb the tree.

After a good deal of toil, however, he reached the topmost branch upon which it was safe to risk his weight, but was disappointed to discover that he was still several feet below the coping of the roof, and that, although he could discern from his point of view that the light he had seen emanated from a window in a turret in the roof, he could not make out whether anybody was inside or not.

But by listening very attentively he caught the hum of voices which seemed to emanate from the turret.

He looked up at the coping, which was just above his head, when he noticed that there was a small garret window within a few feet of him.

The window, which was only about two feet square, was open, and if he could only sway the branch upon which he rested a few feet, he could climb into the window.

He climbed a little higher, throwing his weight on the side toward the house, and had the satisfaction of feeling himself swung over against the building.

The sway of the branch had brought him considerably below the window, but, reaching up, he was able to grasp the ledge.

By clinging on with the tenacity of death and using his utmost strength, he finally succeeded in drawing himself up with his breast resting upon the window ledge, and by degrees to work himself in.

The apartment into which he had come was exceedingly dark, and the detective was at a loss which way to proceed.

He did not know but that the room might be occupied, and a single step might bring him in contact with a murderous enemy.

For the same reason he did not dare to light a match, so, after a little reflection he proceeded to grope his way along in the darkness.

He had not gone very far before his outstretched hand came in contact with the wall.

He groped his way along this, and finally came to a door. He soon found the latch, which he lifted noiselessly and the door opened.

By groping about he soon discovered that he was in a narrow passage, which, he reflected, must lead to somewhere, so he started along it.

Groping his way cautiously along, he at length came to a stairway, but as it led downward, he did not care to use it, and turned about and groped his way back in the opposite direction.

After going a long distance, as it seemed to him, in this direction, he came to another stairway, and this one led upward, so without more ado he began to ascend it.

He had not climbed very far when his further progress was impeded by a door which appeared to be at the landing or head of the stairs.

He groped about for a latch or knob, but there appeared to be none.

Thad realized the danger of attempting to force the door, as the noise would attract those in the turret, so he resorted to the only alternative which seemed to present itself, and that was to place his ear to the aperture with the hope of overhearing of some importance.

But even this availed him nothing, for, although he could again catch the hum of voices somewhere, no articulate word came to his ear.

Thinking there might be a possibility of prying the door open without attracting attention, he took a large knife which he always carried, and, placing it between the lintel and the jamb, gave a heroic surge.

The door, which was a frail affair, yielded somewhat, which encouraged him to use greater effort, and a second surge resulted in snapping the frail fastening, and the door came open.

At the same moment he heard footsteps just beyond, and a second later the forms of several men were outlined against the gray sky, for the door opened upon the roof.

It was not certain that the men had seen him, and he instantly turned and hurried down the dark stairway as fast as was possible without noise.

When he had gone what he considered the necessary distance, Thad slackened his pace and began to feel for the door to the little room into which he had climbed from the tree, for some reason he could not find it.

And then he heard the men descending the stairs, and knew they would soon be upon him, so that there was no time for delay.

He pushed on through the passage without much aim, impelled only by the necessity of avoiding the men, who he had now discovered, from the amount of noise they made, numbered at least half a dozen.

Thinking that he must be nearing the head of the other stairway, Thad slackened his pace and began to grope with his foot for the top step, but when he had gone on in this way for a good distance, and still found no stairway, he was greatly surprised, and began to grow alarmed, for the men were but a few yards behind him.

And then suddenly he came plump up against a wall or partition. The structure was of thin boards, and his impact with it produced a great noise.

The next instant a light was flashed upon him from the crowd behind him.

CHAPTER XI.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

Sudden and unexpected as the flash of light, which had been thrown from a slide-lantern, Thad did not lose his presence of mind.

His long experience had taught him that it takes a few seconds for the man with the light to discern any object upon which the light is thrown, and he determined to make use of that time, short as it was.

He knew that an open battle would be a one-sided affair, as there were six to one, so instead of drawing his revolver he made a quick bound, struck out with both of his fists, flooring two of the men, and then darted away along the passage like the wind.

The light reflected from the slide-lantern revealed the lay of things so that he could see where to go.

He came to a door, and, opening it, passed through, and not a moment too soon, for the next instant a volley of shots whizzed past the door or imbedded themselves in it.

Thad bounded across the room at a few strides in the hope of reaching the window in time to escape before the crowd should come in upon him.

But when he reached the opposite side of the room he was astonished to find no window there.

It was in vain that he felt along the whole length of the wall; no window was to be found. He was in a sad dilemma.

There seemed but one way out of it, and that was to simply back himself up against the wall, draw his revolvers and sell his life as dearly as possible.

He had barely time to put the thought into action, when the door was thrown open, and, to his utter surprise, a single figure appeared, and he discovered the character of the figure just in the nick of time to avoid firing.

It was a woman.

The woman held a light in her hand, and it wanted only a glance to show him who she was.

It was the sickly-looking woman he had seen at the window that night.

How had she got here so suddenly, and what had become of the men, he asked himself, but the thought was scarcely formulated when she raised her long, bony finger in a warning manner and began to speak in her peculiar sepulchral voice:

"Again you have put yourself in peril, in spite of my warning, but if you will profit by my advice you may yet escape."

Instead of making any reply or asking any questions, Thad glanced back at the wall behind him.

The woman seemed to read his thoughts, for she hastened to say:

"Oh, it isn't there. You got into the

wrong room this time. But if you had got into the right one it would have done you no good, for the tree is guarded, so that it would be impossible for you to get down in that way."

His heart sank slightly, but, buoying himself with his usual courage, he said:

"Madam, it is very kind of you to offer to assist me to escape, and I am ready to follow your advice, but how did you know that I was in peril—or in the house at all, for that matter?"

"There is no time for answering questions. I may tell you, though, that I saw you climbing the tree."

Thad could not refrain from just one more question.

"What has become of the men who were in the hall a moment ago?"

"Never mind about them. If you wish to escape, come this way."

So saying, she turned and left the room.

Thad followed her into the hall, and was astonished to see that the men had disappeared and he was still more surprised, as he followed the woman along the hall to find the stairway descending at one end of the hall just as he had seen it on first going to that end of the passage.

Without turning her head to ascertain whether he was following or not, she proceeded to descend the stairs.

The detective kept at her heels, and could not but notice, with a strong feeling of pity, her feeble, tottering motion as she walked.

And all this time he continued to wonder what had become of the five or six men who had been in the passage.

At the bottom of the stairs the woman turned into another narrow passage similar to the one on the floor above, but much shorter, and she soon began to descend a second flight of stairs.

Thad had not imagined he had been so high, and began to be a little alarmed lest his guide should be leading him into a trap.

But a second later they had reached the bottom of the second flight, and, leading him along a hall for a short distance, the woman opened a door, turned, held her candle above her head, and waited for the detective to pass in.

Supposing the door to lead to the outside, he did not hesitate about passing through, but was disappointed to find himself in another very small room.

There was no furniture in the room except a single wooden chair, at which the woman pointed, with the injunction:

"Sit down!"

But not being able to see why she should want him to sit down, he declined, with the remark:

"No, I do not wish to sit down. What I desire now is to get out of this place."

"But you cannot get out of this place until I have prepared you for leaving."

"What do you mean by preparing me for going?"

"That I will show you in a very few moments."

"But I require no preparation, beyond that of an open door, or instruction as to the proper door to open."

"Neither of which you will find until I have prepared you."

"What is the nature of your preparation?"

"I will show you as soon as you are ready."

"I am ready."

Without a word the woman stepped forward, put the candle down upon the floor and drew a long black scarf from somewhere.

"Sit down, sir!" she commanded, in a gentle, but firm tone.

Thad sank mechanically upon the chair, when she instantly stepped behind him and proceeded to bind the scarf about his eyes.

"No, I'll be hanged if I do!" cried the detective, with sudden energy, snatching the bandage from his eyes and jumping to his feet. "Peril or no peril, I prefer to die with my eyes open like a man. Let me out of here."

And he sprang toward the door.

"Open this door, or give me the key."

She meekly took a large key from her

pocket and tossed it to him, and then as he proceeded to put it into the keyhole, she murmured in a plaintive, little voice:

"I wish you would not persist in bringing it upon yourself, sir."

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"That as sure as you go out of that door you are a dead man!"

Thad hesitated and examined her face.

It was impossible to doubt the woman's sincerity, and yet it was hard to think of submitting to the ordeal of being blindfolded without knowing what might follow.

"Do you mean to say that that gang of men is waiting for me outside?" he demanded.

"I say nothing—except, as I did before—that so sure as you go out you will be killed."

He again reflected, and finally came to the conclusion that he could not be much worse off blindfolded than with his eyes open in that place.

So he walked calmly back, took his seat in the chair again and signified his readiness to be hoodwinked.

The woman placed the thick bandage over his eyes and secured it at the back of his head.

"Now, sir, if you will take my hand I will lead you beyond danger."

Thad arose and took the proffered hand and the woman started along with him.

Of course he had no idea which way he was going, but in a little while he felt his feet upon soft, yielding earth, and knew that he was out of doors.

Inspired by a sudden impulse, he raised his hand to tear away the bandage, but, anticipating his intention, the woman caught his hand, and, in a very gentle undertone, admonished:

"Please don't spoil everything just on the eve of success. A few moments and you shall be restored to liberty."

There was something in this frail woman's voice and tone that wielded a wonderful influence over the detective, and he could not but obey this last admonition, much as it was against his inclination.

The woman led him along for what seemed to him half an hour, and at length stopped.

"Now," she said, "you are out of danger. I shall leave you here, but must beg that you will not remove the blindfold for about a minute after my departure."

Thad saw no particular reason for further rebellion, and promised to do as she requested.

"Now I am off," she said, and the next instant he heard her footsteps receding.

Waiting for what he considered the space of a minute, he snatched the bandage from his eyes.

He stared about him, unable to locate himself for some time. Day was just beginning to dawn, and through the gray shadows he could see that he was in a wood, but that there was an opening a few yards distant.

He lost no time in reaching the opening, and found it to be the highway, and only a hundred yards away loomed the house of his friend Watson.

With a feeling of disappointment, mingled with suspicion and anger toward his friend, he made his way back to the house, let himself in and went to bed.

CHAPTER XII.

A FRESH TACK.

It was with a good deal of diffidence that Burr descended from his room the next morning.

The thought of meeting his friend after what had happened the previous night filled him with a sense of repugnance akin to horror.

However, he finally determined to put on a bold face, meet him as usual, and then leave his house without further delay, as he did not wish to be the guest of a man whom he suspected of treachery.

He also wondered in his own mind what sort of greeting he would receive, after the abrupt and unceremonious parting of the night before.

What was his surprise, then, when his friend came forward with his usual smile,

with extended hand and the gracious salutation:

"Good-morning, Thad, my boy. How do you feel after your debauch?"

"Debauch?" said Thad, not understanding what he alluded to.

"Yes, at the reception."

"Oh, that? Fairly well."

"But your subsequent dissipation. Where did you go and what time did you return? You didn't remain at the stable waiting for that young scapegrace very long, I trust?"

Thad was dumfounded.

As Watson spoke he looked his friend frankly in the face, and it would have been impossible for him to have believed anything evil of the speaker, if he had not made the discovery he had the night before.

"No, I did not remain at the stable," he answered, at length.

"Ah! I thought you would soon get weary of your vigil and come to bed."

Thad looked his friend straight in the eye, and the latter returned the look without flinching.

"How is it possible," he mused, "for this man to sit here and ask me such questions, when he must know that I followed him and know all about his rascality?"

But he concluded to humor the ruse, and see how far he would go, so he said:

"No, I did not return to the house and go to bed at once, although I might as well have done so for aught I gained by doing as I did."

"But you say you did not remain at the stable?"

"Neither did I."

"You don't mean to say—"

"Yes," interrupted Thad, "I paid another visit to the house under the hill."

"And discovered?"

"Very little that I would have liked to have discovered, and some things which I would rather have not discovered."

"Indeed?" still innocently.

"The incident which led me to go was in itself painful to me in the extreme."

"What was that?"

"Cannot you guess?"

Watson appeared to reflect, smiled sweetly, laughed a low, good-natured laugh, and finally said:

"I have it! You thought you might find the young scapegrace down there."

"Wrong," replied Thad, promptly.

"The person whom I followed you would not like to have called a scapegrace, I am sure."

"You don't mean to say that you saw our young friend Lemreaux?"

"No, not him."

"Then I cannot imagine who it could have been."

This hypocritical evasion, as he interpreted it, wrought Thad up to a state of irritation bordering on rage, and he was unable to contain himself any longer.

"You mean to tell me, Matt," he began, growing very red and excited, "that you do not know who the party was whom I shadowed from your house to the one under the hill?"

"I certainly do not. How should I?"

"Matt, what is the use of there remaining any mystery between us. We have been friends for twenty years, and in all that time I never had occasion to suspect you of deceit until now."

For the first time Watson looked serious. Staring at the detective with a startled expression, he exclaimed:

"For the love of mercy, Thad, what are you talking about? How have I deceived you? In what manner have I practiced deception? For God's sake, explain yourself!"

Thad was silent for a moment, choked down a lump that arose in his throat, and at length said, in a husky voice:

"Then I will, Matt. It breaks my heart to do it, but honesty and candor compel me to."

He paused and raised his eyes to the face of his friend, which he found pale and anxious.

"Go on," pleaded Watson, breathlessly.

"For God's sake, go on."

"Well, then, you remember the talk

we had after coming down out of Tom Gillam's lodgings; of your advice that we should go to bed, and of my expressed determination to find out, if possible, where Tom was?"

"Yes."

"And you remember you left me with the avowed intention of going to bed?"

"Certainly, and that is exactly what I did."

After another short struggle Thad resumed:

"That is the point which I desire to come at—be honest with me, Matt—for the sake of our old friendship—be honest with me, your best and most devoted friend—before Almighty God, Matt, did you go to bed then?"

Thad had risen from his chair, approached that of his friend, and stood over him, pale and trembling with agitation.

The doctor looked up into his face, and as his eyes met those of the detective, which seemed to penetrate his very soul, he for the first time lost countenance. His eyes fell, and in a hoarse undertone he answered:

"Yes."

There was a terrible silence for a full minute, the doctor still keeping his eyes on the floor, and the detective looking down into his face with those terribly searching eyes. The breath of both men came hard, and there was evidently a terrific struggle going on in the breast of each.

At length Burr spoke, and as he did the tears gushed forth and streamed down his kindly face:

"Matt, would to God I could believe you. And I would rather have died, a thousand times than to have lived to see the day when I should doubt you. Now listen."

Watson looked up with a start, and appeared on the point of retorting, but meeting those awful eyes again, he again dropped his own, clinched hands nervously on the arms of his chair, and remained silent.

"The words that passed between us," resumed the detective, "the answer you gave me, especially its tone, went to my heart like a dagger. I hope God will forgive me, but I could not help it—from that instant the cruel demon of suspicion entered my breast. I watched you as you made your way toward the house. I would rather have not done it, but I could not help it. You soon disappeared in the darkness, but I listened. As I anticipated, the sound of your footsteps diverged before you reached the house. I heard them on the walk that runs around the house and to the front gate."

"My heart sank within me at the discovery, but I determined to follow you and discover where you went, and I did."

There appeared to be a magic in that last word that had the effect of arousing the doctor from his stupor.

He sprang to his feet, livid and trembling with rage.

"What infamous creation is all this, sir, anyway?" he demanded, in a terrible voice. "What motive have you for fabricating all this nonsensical romance and throwing it at me? If you say that you heard me turn from the house instead of entering it, and that you followed me—Thad Burr, you lie!"

Under ordinary circumstances Thad would have knocked him down, or choked him into insensibility, and, as it was, it cost him a heroic effort to restrain himself.

"So be it, Matt. It is the first time I have allowed that epithet to be thrown at me without resenting it in a most fearful manner, and you know that it is only our old friendship that spares you now. But, hard as it is for me to think, much less say it, that friendship is at an end, and I quit your house forever."

So saying, the detective turned upon his heel and strode out of the house.

As soon as he reached the road he started off in the direction of Flushing at a rapid stride, giving no particular thought to his course or destination.

His thoughts were entirely engrossed

with the subject of his late adventures, and especially that part of them which had resulted in the discovery of his friend's falseness.

He found himself very much exhausted and almost famished for food, as it will be remembered he had eaten no breakfast that morning.

These several discoveries were all made about the time of his arrival at the summit of a particularly long and laborious hill, and just here stood, facing the road and a short distance back from it, a remarkably neat and comfortable-looking farmhouse.

A benevolent-faced man of middle age stood at the gate as Thad arrived in front of it, and greeted him the usual rural cordiality.

The detective stopped and exchanged a few words with the good-natured farmer, and then asked if it would be possible to get breakfast.

"Certainly," returned the farmer. "Come right in."

He left his guest on the porch, seated in an old-fashioned arm-chair, while he went in to order breakfast.

Thad sat there half buried in a delicious day-dream, having for the first time in several days completely divested his mind of the wearing thought peculiar to his calling in general, and his present case in particular.

Thus he sat until he was almost sinking into a doze, when he was suddenly aroused from his reverie by some one opening and closing the front gate.

He peered out from between his fingers, which covered his face, indolently, and was considerably surprised to see walking leisurely up the path Horace Lemreaux.

Thad pulled his slouch hat down over his eyes, thus screening his face, and affected to be asleep.

The young man soon arrived on the porch, but instead of entering the house, sat down upon the edge of the porch in a familiar manner and began playing with a dog of the collie breed, which had come up to him as if he were an old acquaintance.

A few minutes more elapsed and then the farmer came out to announce breakfast to Thad, and when he saw the young man he said:

"Hullo, Horry! When did you come?"

"Just a few minutes ago, Uncle Ben."

"Hain't had ye'r breakfast, I don't reckon?"

"No, uncle, and I was never readier for it than at this present moment."

"Well, come in—hit's all ready. Come, mister," he went on, addressing Thad.

Thad arose from his seat and walked toward the door. Almost at the same time Lemreaux arose, and the two men came face to face for the first time since the night of their accidental meeting at Watson's.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN AGREEABLE SURPRISE.

The two men eyed each other curiously for a few seconds, and then the amiable old farmer, realizing the awkwardness of the situation, came to the rescue by saying:

"Mister—I don't believe I got your name—this is a nephew o' mine, Mr. Horace Lemreaux."

"Williams," said Thad, selecting the first name that came uppermost. "Glad to know you, Mr. Lemreaux."

The young man took the proffered hand, kept his eyes fixed upon the detective's face, but did not speak.

The three men then repaired to the simple dining room, where a sumptuous repast was awaiting them, and after the farmer had got his guests seated, he excused himself, saying:

"I reckon you gentlemen'll git on—the old woman'll look after ye—an' I've got to look after some chores."

With that he strode out of the room, leaving the two guests to themselves.

An awkward silence of several minutes' duration followed, during which Thad's mind was busy.

He was determined to bring up the subject nearest his heart at that particular

time, and was struggling for the best means of bringing it about. And then, when he had about formulated a plan, the young man saved him the trouble by saying, with a careless air:

"Williams—was that the name I understood uncle to say?"

"That is my name," rejoined the detective.

"If I am not mistaken we have met before."

"Yes, I think we have."

"I hadn't the pleasure of making your acquaintance at the time, but I saw you, if I do not mistake, at my friend Watson's."

"Yes, there is where you saw me. It was just as you were taking your leave."

"I remember," said Lemreaux, lightly.

Then Thad had another struggle as to how he should proceed, but he promptly made up his mind to act frankly and bluntly. There was no use of beating about the bush. He resumed:

"It was not the first or last time I had the pleasure of seeing you, however I think, Mr. Lemreaux."

"No?" arching his brows.

"No, I saw you on two other occasions, on the last one of which I imagined you had seen me, but I may be mistaken."

"When was the first occasion?" asked the young man, superciliously.

"You were making a call upon your friend Sutter, and for some reason best known to yourself, you had chosen the back way and passed into his premises through what to most people is a secret entrance."

The young man stared at the detective in amazement.

"I do not understand you, sir."

"Perhaps I may be mistaken in saying that you had gone to call upon Sutter. As a matter of fact, I do not imagine that that was your mission. However, if my memory serves me, you merely went to the opening in the stone wall which is concealed from public view by a copse of sumach bushes, and appeared to be looking for something."

The fellow stared harder than ever and grew very red.

"Do you mean to tell me, sir, that I did anything of this kind?"

"Unless there is a twin spirit which is your exact double."

"Then such must be the case," retorted the other, coldly.

"Then you deny that you called at the place I allude to and searched the crevice in the stone wall for a note?"

"Most emphatically!"

"And yet when I saw you at the house of my friend Watson two or three hours later I could have sworn it was the same person."

"You would have sworn falsely, sir."

"I presume, then, that the person whom I saw in Watson's yard at a still later hour, in conversation with Tom Gillam, Watson's stable-boy, was also somebody else?"

"I know nothing about what you are talking about," snarled Lemreaux. "All I know is that I had driven with my uncle here over to Watson's on a matter of business, and that the moment I was finished with Watson uncle and I drove back here."

Burr was more perplexed than ever.

He concluded to try a new tack, and said, in an apologetic tone:

"I presume I must have been mistaken, sir. One is frequently deceived in faces. For instance, I was coming away from the reception given at the house of Mr. Cartwright only last night, when I was overtaken by a buggy containing two men. Just as the buggy came alongside of mine there came a vivid flash of lightning, illuminating the faces of the occupants, and I could have sworn that one of them was yourself and the other Tom Gillam. Of course I was mistaken, as in the other two instances."

Thad expected nothing else but a denial, and an indignant one at that. Then what was his surprise when the young man burst out in a hilarious peal of laughter, extended his hand across the table, and said:

"Put it there, Mr. Burr. It's no use. It is impossible to deceive an old hawk like you. You were right in each instance, and I was just wondering if you were following me as closely as I was you."

Thad was breathless for more than a minute.

"What do you mean?" he at last gasped out. "You don't mean to say—"

"Yes," interrupted Lemreaux, "we are both on the same trail. That you should have suspected me of complicity in the various crimes that these fellows have been perpetrating, I am not surprised. Indeed, I should have been surprised if you hadn't."

"Do you mean to tell me that you are a detective, too?"

"Only in an amateurish way. Listen and I'll tell you how it happened. As soon as my sister found she was robbed, she sent me word with regard to the matter. I had already heard of the death of my friend Howarth, and naturally connected the two crimes, one with the other. I called upon my friend Watson—this is strictly entre nous, remember," he suddenly broke off. "I wouldn't have Watson know I told you for the world, for I have pledged him to secrecy."

"You have my word, sir."

"And it is sufficient. Anybody who knows Thad Burr can have no hesitancy in taking his word as quickly as his bond."

Thad bowed and colored a little at the compliment.

"As I was saying, I called upon my friend Watson, as it was in front of his house that Howarth met with the accident, and about the first thing he told me, in answer to my inquiries, was that you were on the scent, and when I told him I had thought of putting in a little time on the case as a source of amusement, as I had nothing else to do, he advised me not, as he said you might not like it. But I was bent upon my object, and he finally consented half-heartedly, provided I would work in such a way as not to let you know that I was at it."

"That was the night you saw me and my uncle at Watson's. I had known Tom Gillam a long time, as a man will know the servants of a friend, and after a little conversation with him I found that he was paying his respects to Sutter's maid, Bettie."

"Now, from the reputation of Sutter, the moment I heard of the murder and robbery I laid it at his door, so I made it up with Tom to go down to the house that night and find out whatever he could from his sweetheart and bring it to me."

"Did you learn anything worth while?" interrupted Thad, eagerly.

"Not much. In fact, nothing concerning that affair, but Tom got an inkling that there was another job in prospect, and that there was to be a tryst between Sutter or some of his henchmen and one of the confederates outside, and that it was to be held at the spot you mentioned a while ago. It was understood that if anything occurred to prevent the meeting Sutter's henchman was to leave a note in the stone wall."

"So that is what brought you there, was it?" said Thad, laughing.

"Yes, but it seems you got ahead of me."

"Yes, and that is what led me, more than any other circumstance, to believe that you were implicated in the plot."

"I have no doubt of it."

"When I cornered Tom he denied everything."

"True as steel. You see, I had sworn him to secrecy, too."

"One thing more," said Thad, growing serious again. "When Watson discovered you in the yard you ran away like a couple of bucks. What was the meaning of that?"

"We did not care to have him see us there, as I had promised not to do any plotting on his premises, and our intention was to dodge behind the bushes. But when we did so we ran against you, you remember, and then we saw all that there was for it was to run, in the hope that you would not recognize us."

"But why did you run into Sutter's grounds, and why did you jump into the swamp?"

"That was the funniest piece of business I ever experienced," he said. "You see, when we jumped over the hedge Tom didn't go any further, but crouched down behind it in the shadow, while I in jumping landed almost on top of some fellow who was crouching there—some spy of Sutter's, I imagine. At all events, he jumped up and cut like a jack-rabbit. It had been my intention to run but a little way and give you the slip, if possible, but when I saw this fellow start off like a quarter-horse, it struck me at once who he was and what he was up to, and I forgot all about being chased by you and took after him."

"The fellow, as you know, made direct for Sutter's. I gave him a tight race, I can tell you—so tight that he had no time to turn into the house and went headlong into the swamp. I followed him, but it was no use. He was an expert swimmer and knew his ground. So as soon as I saw you and Watson turn back I sneaked out and came back here."

"Your story is quite plausible and extremely satisfactory," said Thad, grasping the young man's hand again, "and it delights me beyond measure to find that I have been mistaken in you all along. Your explanation clears up a good deal of mystery, one thing in particular, and that is how Tom had managed to get back to his lodging and get to bed and to sleep before we reached there, and not have a wet stitch on him. I confess that that had more the appearance of a miracle than anything I had ever encountered."

"It must have looked remarkable."

"But what were you doing on the road from the reception?"

"We had gone there on the same mission that you had—to try and prevent the robbery."

"Where did you keep yourselves all the time?"

"Oh, we were with the servants."

"Another thing."

"Well?"

"Watson—he—he is in no way mixed up in this affair?"

"Poor old Matt," he murmured. "He has got himself into a peck of trouble through promising to keep mum. He told me about your quarrel this morning a few minutes after you left, and the poor old boy is badly broken up over it, but I promised to fix things up, and that is what brought me over here."

"Then he is innocent and I have accused him wrongfully?"

"That is a fact, if there ever was a fact."

CHAPTER XIV.

A COMPACT.

Thad was so delighted over his unexpected discovery that he could scarcely contain himself, and wrung his new acquaintance's hand over and over again.

"You cannot imagine how glad I am to find that all my suspicions with regard to yourself and my old friend were groundless. But now I have got to go back and ask his pardon and begin over again."

"That will not be much of a task, as I have partly paved the way, and it will be all the pleasanter, having suspected him wrongfully, to find that your old estimate of him was the correct one."

"That is true. But, why did the old chap deceive me? How could he allow me to go away feeling as I did? Suppose something had happened so that we had never met again? It would have been terrible, for we have been like brothers these twenty odd years."

"Well, it was no less severe on him, I assure you. But the incident was thoroughly characteristic of the man. He had given his word that he would not reveal my secret, and he was willing to lose his life, or what was equivalent to it with him—his best friend—rather than do it."

"There is another point which I do not understand."

"What is that?"

"Was it your buggy I saw standing in front of Sutter's last night?"

"I am sorry you asked me that."

"Why?"

"Because when I have told you that it was you will be eager for me to explain what it was doing there, and that I cannot tell you—just yet—but you shall know all in good time."

"It was your buggy, then?"

"It was my uncle's, and I had it engaged."

"I confess my eagerness to know what you were doing there, but if there is anything to be gained by keeping it secret for the present, I respect your silence."

"It is hard for me to keep it from you, especially as we are working on the same case, but I must do so for the present. When you know why I do this you will not blame me."

"You have no objection to at least telling me whether you were in Sutter's house, I presume?"

"I dare not tell you even that much."

"Then I shall draw my own inference."

"Which you can do, I presume, very nearly the truth."

"There will be no betrayal of trust to tell me whether Tom Gillam was with you or not?"

"Yes, he was with me."

"One thing more. I was strongly under the impression that I saw my friend Watson go. He denies it, and, under the circumstances, I must believe him. What do you say?"

"Well, he denies it—so must I."

"From which I must infer that he was there, as I suspected, but that you would prefer to remain non-committal?"

"I cannot, of course, interfere with your inferences, but you must not draw them from anything I have said," said the young man, a little tartly.

"At least I shall interpret nothing you have said as a statement, pro or con."

"That is more to the point. Now what shall we do, Mr. Burr, work together, go our separate ways, or would you prefer that I should clear the field and leave it to you entirely?"

"Let us work together, but upon one condition."

"And that is?"

"That you make a clean breast of whatever you have accomplished thus far. I go into partnership with nobody without first having a look at the ledger."

"I have not made much headway thus far, but what I had accomplished I had resolved to keep to myself. I do not know that this course is entirely wise, however, especially if we are to work in collaboration. I know from your reputation that I can rely upon your integrity."

"I should hope so."

After another silence the young man went on:

"I will begin with answering your question a while ago."

"With regard to being at Sutter's house last night?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"Yes I was there."

"And Tom also?"

"Yes."

"And Watson?"

"That must remain for him to answer. If he has no objection to telling you, well and good. However, I will tell you this much, I did not see him there."

"Was Sutter aware that you were there?"

"Yes, I was there as his guest, but of course he did not know who I really am."

"I see. He imagines you to be one of his own stripe."

"I think he does, but I am not sure about that."

"He did not reveal much of his business, then?"

"Not an iota. I tried my utmost to learn whether he had been at the reception or not, but he affected to be in ignorance of the very fact that there had been a reception. I pretended that I had been there—as indeed I had, in a way—and that I had had something to do with the robbery."

"What did he say to that?"

"He opened his eyes very wide, and

said: 'Ah, was there a robbery, then? Oh, he's a keen one!'"

"You have good reason to believe that he was there, and that he had something to do with the robbery, I presume."

"I have every reason to believe it, but it is going to take the combined wit of the two of us to prove it."

"But we shall succeed in the end."

"I hope so."

"Was Tom also there as the guest of Sutter?"

"Certainly not. Tom was a guest of the servants. While I was with the head of the house gleaning whatever there was to be got in that direction, Tom was in the servants' hall, taking advantage of his favor with Bettie to pick up whatever crumbs there lay about in that quarter."

"Let me see," mused the detective. "You were there in the neighborhood of two o'clock in the morning."

"Yes, from half-past one till half-past three."

"And you were in the turret?"

"How did you know that?"

"I was there also."

"In the turret?"

"No, not exactly; but very close to it."

"You don't mean to say it was you—"

"That you shot at? Yes," interposed Thad.

"By George! It was lucky—anyway, I had no hand in the shooting. It was the other fellows."

"Who were the other fellows?"

"Sutter and his crowd—five in all, and with myself, six."

"Do you know their names?"

"Not their right names, but I suspect they are respected citizens of the neighborhood, most of them, at least."

"Did they recognize who I was?"

"I cannot tell whether they did in reality or not. They affected to think that you were a burglar."

"Did you recognize me?"

"No."

"You remember that just as they fired I dodged into a room?"

"Yes."

"Well, when I came out in a few minutes, or seconds rather, you had all disappeared. Where had you gone and why did you run away?"

"It was Sutter's suggestion that we return to the turret, and when we had done so he and two of his men went down with the avowed intention of 'taking care' of you. Did you see anything of them?"

"Not a shadow."

"In your skirmishing about the place did you ever get a peep at that wife of Sutter's?"

"Never. Didn't know, except from hearsay, that he had a wife."

"Well, he has, and a queer creature she is, too."

Thad then went on to relate his odd experience with this woman, from the time of his first seeing her at the barred window to the moment she left him, blindfolded, in the grove near Watson's house.

"This is most remarkable," Lemreaux declared. "But I am glad you told me about her. She may be of use to us in the future. But it is strange she should have released you, in the first place, and stranger still that she should have blindfolded you."

"My only theory for that is that she did not want me to know which way I went out. In my opinion, she led me out by some secret passage, and she was afraid that if I should discover the existence of the passage I would use it at some future time to get back and succeed in betraying her husband."

"That is doubtless it. But how the deuce did you manage to get in this time?"

Thad told him about the tree which he had used as a ladder, and the garret window through which he had climbed.

"There is no doubt about your success."

"By the way," said Thad, after another silence, "what did you learn from these fellows? Any of their secrets?"

"No. But I hope to next time. I have an appointment to dine there to-morrow night, and I shall do my best to learn something. I think I will in time be able to worm myself into Sutter's confidence by

making him believe that I am anxious to join his crowd. And blessed if I don't join it, if they will allow me."

"That would be a very good way to get possession of their secrets, and possibly the only way. Go in, my boy. I'll join them, too, if they give me half a chance. But there is one thing you must look out for."

"What is that?"

"This fellow Sutter is evidently very shrewd, and it would not be well to let him know that you are on too intimate terms with Watson. He may suspect your motives, if you do. Perhaps it would be as well for you to keep away from there for the present."

"I shouldn't wonder if you were right about that. But that breaks in upon my plans somewhat."

"How is that?"

"I calculated that we would ride back over there this morning, and bring about the reconciliation between you and the doctor."

"Oh, well, we can do that to-night, after dark."

"Take my word for it—broad daylight is the safest."

"Spies, eh?"

"Yes; as soon as the shadows begin to fall Sutter's spies are out in all directions."

"Aha! I guess you know more about his affairs than you have confessed."

The young man made no reply, and arose from the table with the suggestion that they start at once for Watson's.

CHAPTER XV.

ALMOST A TRAGEDY.

It was somewhat after noon before Thad and Lemreaux got fairly started upon their journey, and as the day was warm and they were in no hurry, they took their time.

They discussed their plans as they walked along, and had made about half the distance, when an idea occurred to the detective, and he stopped, took something from his pocket and adjusted it to his face.

His companion was surprised at the effect, for Thad had invested himself with a full beard.

"That may prevent any unpleasant complications in the event of our meeting with any of the crooked gentry," Burr explained.

"A good idea," declared Lemreaux. "I wish I were similarly disguised."

"Here you are," said Thad, taking out another pair of whiskers. "Let me fix it for you."

And a moment later the young man was so disguised that his best friends would not have recognized him.

"That will do it. Now let us push on."

It was a fortunate thing that the detective had taken this precaution, for they had scarcely resumed their journey, and had just mounted to the summit of a hill, when Lemreaux exclaimed, under his breath:

"Here comes a pair of them now."

As Thad looked, sure enough, two men came galloping down the opposite hill approaching them.

"Who are they?" asked Thad.

"I don't know their names, but they were at Sutter's last night."

"They look to be farmers, and respectable ones at that."

"Which I have no doubt they are; at least, they pass for such among their neighbors."

By this time the horsemen were so close upon them that farther comment would have been indiscreet, and our friends became silent.

Thad took particular notice of the men, and, as Lemreaux had suggested, they had the appearance of well-to-do and respectable farmers.

They were mounted upon magnificent horses, and were riding at a speed which seemed to indicate that they were in somewhat of a hurry.

The men paid no attention to the pedestrians and galloped on past, and were soon clattering down the hill which Thad and his companion had just ascended.

"They must be in a hurry," observed Thad.

"Oh, I don't know. That is the way these people ride."

"Nevertheless, I'll wager they are on some crooked business."

At that moment one of the horses, a big black Arabian stallion, took fright at something at the side of the road, made a mad dash, wheeled, reared, unsaddled his rider, and then came dashing back up the hill toward Thad and his companion, dragging his rider by the stirrup.

Burr and Lemreaux stood in the road, and, with considerable effort, succeeded in heading off the panicked steed and grasping him by the bit.

The late rider, from having his head knocked and banged over the rocky road, was bleeding profusely, and had already become unconscious.

His companion had wheeled his horse and ridden back, and as Thad and Lemreaux released the man's foot from the stirrup and carried him to the side of the road and laid him on the grass, the man on horseback asked, somewhat carelessly:

"Is he hurt much?"

"Can't tell just yet," answered the detective. "He's pretty badly bruised, but it is impossible to tell whether he has received any internal injuries or not."

Thad examined the man's pulse, and then, taking a small bottle of brandy from his pocket, applied it to the unconscious man's lips.

The detective then put the bottle down and proceeded to open the man's shirt at the bosom for the purpose of giving him more air and accelerating his breathing and of ascertaining whether his heart was beating regularly or not.

But scarcely had he begun the operation when the man on the horse called out:

"Here! None o' that!"

Thad looked up in surprise, and saw that the man was already dismounting.

Nevertheless, he returned to his work, but the next instant the man, who had by this time dismounted, sprang at him and grasped his arm and with a terrible oath commanded:

"Keep ye'r hands off that man, sir!"

"What is your objection?" Thad asked, coolly.

"Never mind what my objection is; you just keep ye'r hands offen him."

"In that case, I shall do nothing of the kind."

Again the farmer, who was a big, powerful man, sprang at him, and, grasping his wrist, snatched it away from the unconscious man's bosom.

This was too much for Thad. He was ordinarily cool and patient, but this un-called-for insolence was more than he could stand, and, quicker than a flash, he jumped to his feet and let drive with his fist, sending the farmer reeling into the road on the flat of his back.

He then returned to his operation as coolly as if nothing had occurred to disturb him.

In another instant the prostrate man's bosom had been torn open, and then it appeared why his companion objected to the operation.

Next to his body, suspended by a cord about his neck, hung a small bag made of chamols skin, and from its weight and feeling, it appeared to contain something valuable, probably diamonds.

The bag was marked with two initials: "L. L."

At sight of it Lemreaux uttered a shriek of mingled surprise and delight.

"Sister's diamonds!"

And before Thad could interpose an objection he had snatched the bag from the fellow's neck.

Almost at the same instant the prostrate man recovered his senses and the other one had regained his feet and returned to the attack.

Rushing upon the detective, who was still stooping over, he aimed a deadly blow at him with his fist, but Thad was too quick for him, and dodged the blow, and the next instant was upon his feet.

Meanwhile the recovered man on the ground had made a grab for the jewel-

bag, and he and Lemreaux were struggling for its possession.

The farmer was much the stronger man of the two, and, after a few seconds he had regained his strength sufficiently to give the young man a hard tussle, with the odds in favor of the farmer.

When Thad got upon his feet and faced his antagonist he found that he had drawn a revolver and had it leveled at him.

But Thad was too much wrought up by this time to take any notice of so trivial a thing as that, and before the fellow had time to suspect what was in store for him the revolver was knocked spinning from his hand and Thad had him by the throat.

The fellow struggled manfully, but he was as an infant in the giant clutch of the detective, and soon succumbed and sank to the ground.

Then Thad clasped the handcuffs on his wrists with the quiet declaration: "You are my prisoner."

He then snatched off the farmer's necktie, which was a long, stout scarf, and bound his legs together, after which he left him and returned to the assistance of Lemreaux.

And he was not a moment too soon.

The gigantic farmer had fully recovered his strength, gained the upper hand of the young man, got him by the throat, and was on top of him.

But a single blow from the detective caused him to relax his grip and turn over on the sod.

In a twinkling Thad had the darbies on him, and then, rising to his feet, remarked:

"Now we have got them, what shall we do with them?"

"Get them mounted, I suppose, and take them to Flushing."

"What is the meaning of this outrage?" demanded the first man whom Thad had handcuffed.

"You are under arrest," replied Thad.

"Upon what charge?"

"The present charge will be having in your possession stolen goods, and assault, but something much graver may be brought against you before we are done with you."

The fellow grew very pale, ground his teeth with rage, and offered no further protest.

Lemreaux unhitched the horse of the wounded man, and led him into the road, while the detective took hold of the bridle of the other man's horse, and said:

"Now, gentlemen, will you quietly mount, or shall we be obliged to use force?"

Instead of answering the question, the wounded man raised his head and demanded, in a dogged tone:

"Who are you, anyway? What authority have you got for arresting us, I should like to know?"

The detective first exhibited his badge and then explained:

"I am a detective. I am at work upon the case of the murder and robbery of Orlando Howarth, and I have been invested by the sheriff of your county with full authority to arrest any one against whom I have sufficient evidence to suspect as having any complicity in the crime. I have found some of the stolen goods upon you, which is sufficient in itself to warrant your arrest."

The men offered no further protest, and after a good deal of reluctance about mounting their horses, said:

"Very well; come to think of it, it will be better to make them walk."

With which he mounted one of the horses himself, and directed his companion to mount the other one.

The bonds had been cut from the older man's legs so that he could rise, and after a good many threats and the drawing of his revolver, the detective finally got the procession started, he guarding one of the men and Lemreaux the other.

In this fashion, after a long and tedious journey, they reached Flushing, where the train was taken for Long Island City, the county seat.

The prisoners were searched by the authorities before being locked up, but nothing more of an incriminating character was found upon them.

"In my opinion," said Lemreaux, as he and Thad were returning, "we have got the worst of the gang, outside of Sutter himself. These men appeared to have about as much to say as Sutter himself, and I could see that he deferred to them in nearly everything."

"And yet you say that nothing pertaining to their secret affairs was discussed?"

"No, there was not; but in the matters which were discussed they seemed to be looked upon with a good deal of favor."

"Possibly this arrest will result in more than we expect, then."

"That is my view of it."

Late that afternoon the two arrived at Watson's, and Lemreaux led the way into the house.

The doctor came forward with his accustomed smile to welcome Thad, but the latter did not meet his old friend as graciously as he had been in the habit of doing before their differences.

And then Lemreaux put everything right by saying:

"It's all right, Matt. I've explained everything to our friend here and he is willing to forgive if you are."

The two former friends clasped hands, and Thad said, with the tears standing in his eyes:

"How could you have done it, old fellow? I can't blame you since I have learned the truth, but you knew you were breaking my heart."

"I did know it, old friend, but it was no harder for you than it was for me. And then I had promised Horry to keep his secret, and I would have died rather than break my word."

"Just like you, my dear old friend."

CHAPTER XVI.

PLOTTING AGAINST THE PLOTTERS.

When supper was over the three friends repaired to the sitting-room to talk over their plans for defeating the gang of robbers.

"What are your plans, Mr. Burr, for the future?" asked Lemreaux, by way of a starter.

"Well, my idea is for you to meet your engagement with Sutter to-morrow night and learn whatever you can, and then we shall know how to proceed."

"And in the meantime?"

"We shall have to remain idle, I presume."

"Do you think nothing could be accomplished by reconnoitering in the vicinity of the house to-night?"

"It will do no harm to pay the gentleman a clandestine call, although I do not deem it prudent to go as far as I did last night."

It was necessary at this point to explain to Watson, who had thus far heard nothing of the proceedings of the previous night.

At its conclusion he said:

"Wouldn't it be possible to get Sutter's wife out of the house and take her away some place?"

"No, I think not," answered Thad. "She seems as much wedded to the place as if it were a palace on a hill. From the conversation I had with her it does not seem likely that she would either do anything to get her husband into the toils or desert him."

A short silence followed, and then he resumed:

"There is one thing to be guarded against, my boy, in going there to-morrow night."

"What is that?"

"The whole thing may be a plot to get you into the clutches of the gang. You must go well armed and be constantly on your guard. In the meantime, I shall be as near you as circumstances will permit, so that if you get into trouble I can be there to assist you. By the way," he went on, taking a small whistle from his pocket, "take this along, and in the event of anything occurring which seems to indicate that you are in peril, manage to get this out and blow a sharp blast on it."

Some time later the two men disguised themselves and made a tour of the house under the hill, but as usual it was in

darkness. Not even the light from the turret was to be seen.

Thad made his way to the swampy back yard in the hope of catching a glimpse of the strange woman at her case-ment, but to no purpose. If she was there she had the room so dark that she was not visible.

"I guess we might as well give it up for to-night," decided the detective, at last.

And they made their way back toward the secret opening in the stone wall.

As they approached the opening a dark figure glided out of the clump of bushes and moved off in the darkness.

"Hannah," almost involuntarily whispered Thad.

"I wonder what she is doing here?"

"Spying, of course."

"I shouldn't wonder if she had seen us go in and gave the alarm, which accounts for the house being in darkness."

"Very likely."

But when they passed through the opening, which they did a moment later, another figure jumped out of the bunch of sumachs and darted up the hill.

Thad decided mentally that it was Tom, of whom he still entertained some suspicion.

So much was he impressed with this idea that when they came opposite the stable yard he suggested that they go up to the carriage-house loft and have a talk with Tom.

Lemreaux offered no objection, and they were soon climbing the rude stairway.

When the detective, who was in the lead, reached the door, he found it standing open and the room beyond in total darkness.

The sound of some one moving about inside came to him, however, and he called:

"Tom!"

"Yes, sir," came from the darkness.

"Is that you, Tom?" asked Thad.

"Yessir."

"Where is your light?"

"Have it in a jiffy, sir."

Thad walked into the room, and was followed by Lemreaux.

A second later the light of a match flared up, which Tom applied to his candle.

"Just getting in, I see," observed the detective, carelessly.

"Yes, sir. Had some chores to do that kep' me till jist now."

"I was not aware that part of your chores took you down under the hill, Tom," said Thad, laughing.

Tom stared at him with his usual ingenuous, childish stare, and said nothing.

"Come, you rogue," pursued Thad, poking him in the ribs. "There is no use of your trying to deny it. We saw you."

"Seen me?" muttered the boy, innocently.

"Yes; we saw you coming out of the sumachs near the opening in the stone wall."

"Not me, sir."

"Oh, I'm sure of it."

"But, sir, I tell ye I've not been there; I've been a-doin' of my chores."

"Look here, Tom," began the detective, in a severe tone, "I believed you once, when you denied that it was you helping old Hannah carry the valise, but the thing was too plain this time."

Nevertheless, there was no such thing as inducing him to confess, and Thad started on a fresh tack.

"Never mind, Tom; deny it if you will, but I have a hold on you."

"What's that, sir?" cried the boy in alarm.

"I shouldn't have said a word if you had been out there talking to Bettie. There would have been some excuse for that; but old Hannah! I am surprised at you! And do you know what I propose to do?"

"It wasn't—"

"I'm going to tell Bettie."

"But it wasn't—"

"When Bettie learns that you are in the habit of courting old Hannah in the sumach bushes, your goose will be cooked with her."

"But, sir," gasped the young man desperately, "it wasn't—"

"Wasn't who?"

"Old Hannah, sir."

"Who was it, then?"

"It was—"

But at this point he discovered that he was on the point of tripping himself, and became silent, while his face grew as red as his flannel shirt.

"It wasn't who, Tom?" persisted Thad.

"It wasn't nobuddy."

"Never mind, Tom. You had as well tell us the truth. You have as good as confessed that you were at the place, and there is no use of trying to conceal anything."

At this point Thad chanced to glance in the direction of Lemreaux, and was surprised at the expression of his countenance.

He was staring at Tom with a look of blank amazement, and seemed to be trying to make out whether he was not dreaming.

"Come, Tom," pursued the detective, "what were you saying to old Hannah, and what was she telling you?"

"Nothin', sir. I didn't see Hannah."

"You are sure of that?"

"Yessir."

"Now, my boy, I happen to know a few things. Suppose I tell you what Hannah told me that what passed between you, if brought before the officers of the law, would land you in the penitentiary."

"Please, sir, for God's sake, sir!" besought the boy, "don't give me away! It wasn't my fault, sir. They made me do it. Don't arrest me, sir! Please don't arrest me! I'll do anything for ye if ye don't arrest me!"

"Get up!" ordered Thad, sternly.

The young man got upon his feet and trembled so violently as to scarcely be able to stand.

"Now, sir, tell me all about it. Tell me what you were doing down there!"

"I—I—it wasn't my fault, sir," pleaded Tom, piteously.

"Never mind whose fault it was; what were you doing there?"

"I couldn't help it, sir. He made me go, and he'd 'a' killed me if I hadn't 'a' went."

"He? Whom?"

"W'y—w'y—oh, sir, I don't dare to tell. He'll kill me if I do!"

"There is no danger of that, my boy," interposed Thad, in a kindly voice. "I'll see that you are not molested. Tell me who it was that made you go down there."

"It was—was—" and the boy seemed to be choking with something rising in his throat. "It was—"

"Whom?"

"Leslie, sir," he managed to gasp. "Now I've said it, an' I jest know I'm a goner."

"Leslie? Who is Leslie?"

"He's a man what was there this mornin', an' I met 'im on the road out yander with Bradlaw, an' he give me a note and told me to take it down to the sumach patch an' give it to Hanner, who'd be a-waitin' there fer it."

"You do not know what the note contained, do you?"

"No, sir."

"It was sealed up, then?"

"No, sir; but I can't read writin'."

"A very good reason. You say there were two of them, and that they were a-horseback?"

"Yes, sir; and the one what give me the note was a-ridin' a coal-black stallion, and t'other one a bay geldin'."

"What were the men like?"

"The one on the black stallion was a short-like man, kinder heavy-built like me, an' wore a mushtash; an' t'other was a taller man, purty heavy built, kinder gray, and wore a full beard."

"Those are our fellows, Lemreaux," interjected Thad, turning to the young man.

"Well," he pursued, addressing Tom again, "I guess those chaps won't bother you again."

"How so, sir?"

"They are both in jail."

"Glory! Air ye sure o' that, sir?"

"Oh, yes! I saw them locked up this afternoon."

"That's good!" cried the boy, joyously.

"They can't do me no harm now."

"No, they cannot do you any harm now. But, tell me, what more do you know about these people under the hill?"

"Mighty precious little, sir. I know they're a run lot, and that is all, sir."

"Then you did not know that you were doing wrong in taking the note down there?"

"I—I didn't think it was right, but I knowed Leslie'd kill me if I didn't."

"Did he tell you he would kill you if you neglected his order?"

"Yes, sir."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE WARNING SIGNAL.

Tom's frank and apparently honest replies to all of the detective's questions had the effect of altering the latter's opinion of the boy somewhat; but there were still some things he would have liked to have had cleared up, and to that end continued:

"Tom, your answers so far have been very satisfactory, but there is one more question I would like you to answer, and I want nothing but the truth. If you tell me anything else I shall find it out in due time and it will not go well with you. Do you hear?"

"Yessir."

"Now, I have asked you twice before whether it was not you who helped old Hannah to carry that valise, and each time you have denied it. I still have reason to believe that it was you, and shall insist upon the truth this time."

Tom hung his head and did not answer.

"Are you going to answer me?" thundered the detective. "Was it not you?"

After another silence of some moments' duration Tom looked up with a hopeful countenance and asked:

"Ye say Leslie's locked up?"

"Yes, tighter than a jug."

"An' Bradlaw, too?"

"Yes."

"An' neither of 'em kin never do me no harm?"

"Certainly not."

"Wal, then, I'll tell ye the truth—it was me."

"I thought I was not mistaken. What did the bag contain?"

"I dun'no, 'cept what Hannah said."

"What did she say?"

"She said when we started that if she had what was in that bag she could shine equal to Queen Victoria."

"Did you ask her to explain what she meant?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did she say?"

"She said, 'Oh, nothin', but I sorter guessed she meant that the bag was filled with sparklers and yaller boys."

"By which you mean diamonds and gold, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where did you get the bag?"

"In the sumach bushes."

"Who put it there?"

"I dun'no, sir."

"How did you know it was there?"

"I didn't know it till Hanner took it out and asked me to help her with it."

"Had anybody told you to go there to help Hannah with the bag?"

"No, sir."

"Are you sure? Didn't Leslie or Bradlaw tell you to go there?"

"No, sir; nobody didn't tell me."

"How came you to go, then?"

"Why—I jest—went to—to—"

"To see Bettie?" interrupted the detective, laughing.

"Yessir," muttered the boy, sheepishly.

"Ah! that was it. And Hannah met you at the entrance to the lot and asked you to assist her?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where did you take the bag?"

"Jest to the back of the house."

"And what did you do then?"

"Sot the bag down in the water. And then Hanner snatched it up, an' said, 'You fool, you! don't you know that might contain things that will spile in the water?' and then she told me to go 'bout my business, an' I went, leavin' her there with the bag."

"So you did not see what she did with it, or where she took it?"

"No, sir."

"This is all very satisfactory, Tom. But there is one thing more I wish to ask you."

"Wal, sir?"

"When I alluded a while ago to what Hannah had told me with regard to the conversation which had passed between you and her you became terribly frightened. Now, what was the nature of that conversation?"

The boy glanced up with a quick start, his face wreathed in a comical smile, as he replied:

"I thought she'd told ye what it was."

Thad saw that he was caught in his own ruse, and hastened to make amends:

"Of course she told me, but I want your version of it, so as to be able to judge whether she told me the truth or not."

"Why, then, if she told ye there was any kind o' talk atween us, she told ye a lie, for there wasn't nothin' said 'cept 'Good-evenin' on my side, an' 'I have ye got the letter?' on her side, an' then 'Yes,' on my side, an' then 'All right' on her side, an' that was all."

"What caused you to look so frightened when I spoke to you about it?"

"Oh, I didn't know but she might 'a' told ye somethin' 'bout what was in the letter, an' I didn't know but there might be somethin' 'bout me a-carryin' it, an' I knowed if there was you'd know I lied when I said I wasn't there."

Thad was satisfied that the boy was innocent of any willful complicity in any crime which might have been committed by the members of the gang, and took his leave.

When he and Lemreaux reached the ground the latter said:

"That is the greatest surprise I have had yet."

"What is that?" asked Thad.

"What you managed to draw out of that boy."

"You did not believe that he had been mixed up in any of these transactions, eh?"

"Not the least."

"Still there is little doubt in my mind as to his innocence of any intentional wrong."

"Yes, I believe that. But I did not believe he had done any of the things of which you accused him. He must be extremely simple-minded to allow himself to be gulled in that way."

"It was not a matter of gulling, my boy. Put yourself in his place. Suppose you were a simple country lout as he is, and a man like either of the fellows we met on the road to-day should come up to you and threaten you with death if you did not do his commands? Don't you think you would obey?"

"I have no doubt I would."

The following day was spent quietly by the two men at the house of their mutual friend, and about five o'clock Lemreaux started for Sutter's, the dinner hour being at six.

Thad spent another anxious two hours, and then, after making himself up to resemble something like a tramp, put off in the direction of the house under the hill.

Unlike all previous visits, the sitting room was a blaze of light, on this occasion, and as the detective drew near the house the notes of a violin fell upon his ears.

Creeping cautiously to one end of the house, he was about to conceal himself in the shadow, when the big St. Bernard came round the house, barking furiously.

Being a swift runner, Thad succeeded in reaching the stile first, and the dog appeared to be satisfied with chasing the tramp out of the yard and trotted back to the house.

The detective was in a sad quandary now.

It seemed out of the question to attempt to get near the house again, and yet if he did not his game was up.

At length he hit upon a plan.

He remembered the way he had got out of the premises on a former occasion, by going to the farther extremity and following the stream, and determined to try the same route again.

The trip had taken the better part of an hour, and when he got back the second time the music had ceased and the lights had disappeared from the sitting-room windows.

Concluding that the company had repaired to the turret, he passed around to the rear of the house and looked up.

Sure enough, as he had anticipated, the light was streaming from the window above the roof.

Moving a little further along so as to bring himself opposite the window of the woman he had seen there before, he looked up in the hope of again getting a glimpse of her. But all was darkness within, and he concluded that she had either retired or gone to another room.

His mind next turned to the tree, and without more ado he began climbing.

He was not long in reaching the top-most branch, when he made two discoveries almost at the same time.

The attic window was closed and fastened, while at another window, further along, and out of his reach, appeared a face, the black, piercing eyes of which peered out at him.

There was a dim light in the room from which the window opened, enough for him to discern this and to recognize the face as that of old Hannah.

Burr saw at once that the game was up so far as this enterprise was concerned, and was on the point of sliding down the trunk of the tree to the ground when the sharp blast of a whistle broke upon his ear from somewhere above.

The sound filled Thad with anxiety and horror, for he knew it portended evil to his friend, but he was helpless to render the young man any assistance.

At the same moment Hannah broke forth in a coarse, brutal laugh, and followed it with the taunting words:

"Did ye hear that whistle? Do ye know what that means? It means that yer pal's about to be tortured! He! he! he!"

Thad ground his teeth with rage, and it was all he could do to refrain from drawing his revolver and shooting the heartless fiend dead where she sat. But he soon abandoned this foolish notion, and determined to make a heroic effort to effect an entrance to the house at all hazards.

With this resolution he swung himself over against the house and with his foot delivered several terrific kicks at the stubborn shutter.

A few vigorous strokes with his heavy boot-heel caused the shutter to yield, and presently it gave way and flew open.

Thad was too much excited now to consider the probable consequences of entering the house under the very eyes of old Hannah, and in another minute had swung himself on to the window-ledge and pulled himself inside.

The instant he was upon his feet he dashed across the room, through the door and into the narrow passage.

The passage was in total darkness, but the next instant a light flashed upon him, and looking in the direction, Hannah stood before him with a candle in one hand and a cocked revolver in the other.

"Make a move and you are a dead man!" she muttered, hoarsely.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SAVE YOURSELF!

An ordinary man would have quailed under the circumstances, but Thaddeus Burr had passed through too many trying ordeals—stared death in the face too often in his checkered career, to experience much concern at sight of the fiendish woman.

Her sallow complexion appeared more bloodless and deathlike in the light of the candle, and her black, devilish eyes had never gleamed forth with such fiendishness, Thad thought; while her long, black hair, hanging loose about her massive shoulders, added to the weirdness of the picture, and gave her the appearance of a living Medea.

But the picture was not terrible to

Thad. It was interesting, and he took a few seconds in which to coolly study it.

He did not forget, however, that everything depended upon quick and decisive action, and that there was no time to be wasted in speculation.

So, after contemplating the woman with a cool stare for the space of a few seconds, he made a lightning-like move—so quick and unexpected that the woman was taken completely off her guard—and with a single blow knocked the revolver and candle both away from her, and the next instant clutched her by the throat with a grip of steel.

But, sudden as had been his action, his grip had not closed upon her jugular quite quick enough to prevent the utterance of one shrill shriek that rang through the still corridors like a steam whistle.

The detective knew that it would soon be up with him after that, but it was impossible to relax his hold upon the woman's throat, as she would only repeat the alarm, and in the darkness, as they were, she might succeed in doing him some terrible injury before he could find his way out, so he struggled on.

She possessed the strength of a giant, and her flesh appeared to be as hard as iron, so that his grip on her throat had the effect of silencing her, but no further impression, so far as he could perceive.

For a single moment he would seem to prevail, for, as we know, Thad was a giant himself, and the next moment she would hurl him backward with such violence as to almost throw him off his feet.

At length he secured an advantage—got her to staggering backward, and, taking advantage of the situation, kept her on the run.

He had not the least idea where they would land, but he kept on shoving her along, increasing the speed every second, and hoping she would trip over something and fall.

This had all passed in the space of a few seconds, and then Thad heard heavy footsteps behind him and realized that the gang was upon him.

The light borne by the men flashed about him for a single second, and then the woman contrived to resist the pressure of his fingers on her neck enough to let off another scream.

But this time it had a different tone.

For the instant Thad thought it was intended as a signal to the men, but in the fraction of a second he discovered his mistake, for the thought had no more than flashed through his mind than the woman dropped as if the floor had been snatched from beneath her, and so firm was her grasp upon him that she dragged him down with her.

Then it was he discovered the cause of her scream and fall.

She had backed over the landing of the stairway, and down, down they plunged, over and over, heels over head, until Thad thought they should never reach the bottom.

But they did, finally, and with a terrific crash.

The space at the foot of the stairs was very narrow, and the woman struck first, her head impacting with terrific force against the wall.

Being underneath at the last moment, she served as a buffet for the detective, so that he sustained no injury, aside from the bruises he had received rolling down the stairs; but when he sprang to his feet he saw that the woman did not move, and knew that she had either broken her neck or had been severely stunned.

Thad instinctively glanced up to the top of the stairs, from which a light was streaming, and beheld half a dozen curious and half-frightened faces peering over the railing in the vain attempt to penetrate the gloom at the bottom of the stairs and ascertain what the rumpus was all about.

"What's up down there?" finally called a voice, which Thad recognized as that of Sutter.

But realizing that he could not be seen by those at the top of the stairs, Thad made no answer, and glided silently and

swiftly along the passage into which he had fallen.

He had not acted upon this resolution an instant too soon, for the next moment he saw the light moving down the stairs and heard the tramp of the six or seven men cautiously and slowly descending.

The detective pushed further along in the passage, less with the purpose now of discovering some means of escape than of getting a look at the men who were coming down the stairs, so as to be able to identify them again.

But as they continued to descend it was necessary for him to keep moving to keep out of the range of their light.

The men finally reached the foot of the stairs, and one of them holding the light down to old Hannah's face, they all stooped over to examine the unconscious woman.

At length one of them lifted her hand to examine her pulse. And straightening up quickly, gasped, "Dead!"

"Dead?" echoed Sutter, in a sarcastic tone.

And then stooping over and examining the woman's pulse himself, he uttered a little laugh, with the remark:

"Just as I thought. It will take more than that to kill old Hannah. But take hold, men, and carry her into her room."

Thad had reached the end of the passage and could go no further in that direction, and as there was no apparent means of egress in that quarter, he could do nothing but crouch in the gloomiest corner and wait to see which way the men were going with the fainting woman.

It was his fond hope that they would carry her up-stairs to the room in which he had lately seen her, which would give him a chance to escape. But in this he was to be disappointed, for a moment later they had lifted the woman from the floor and started along the passage directly toward him.

Thad then noticed that there was a door opening off the hall in each direction, one to the right and one to the left, and naturally guessed that into one of these the woman would be carried. But the question was, which one.

In a spirit of desperation he chose the door leading to the left, opened it softly and glided in, and as softly closed it after him.

He did not take time to lock the door, or even ascertain whether there was a lock or not, but pushed on into the dark room.

He had gone but a short distance when he ran against a bed. Then it occurred to him that he had chosen the wrong course, as this was in all probability Hannah's room.

Groping his way around the bed, he finally ran up against the wall, and groping hurriedly along this he felt a door.

Fumbling about he found the latch, opened the door and passed through, but only to find himself in a very narrow clothes closet, hung about with musty, ill-smelling skirts.

Uncomfortable as was the situation, however, there was no other alternative than to put up with it for the time being, and pulled the door to.

And this he did not a second too soon, for the next instant he heard the door of the room open and the heavy footsteps of the men bearing the injured woman.

He heard them lay her on the bed, and then followed a good deal of talk, during which it appeared that some one was ministering to the patient and endeavoring to restore her to consciousness.

At length they seemed to have succeeded, for he could hear the occasional coarse familiar accents of the woman, somewhat feeble now, but not the less repulsive for all that.

And then, to his supreme delight, Thad heard the men withdraw with the expressed intention of finding that "tramp" or detective, or whatever he was.

During all this time the detective had been in a state of anxious apprehension lest some of the gang should open the closet door for some purpose; nevertheless, he was prepared to receive them if they had ventured upon such a mission,

for he stood there with both revolvers cocked and pointing at the door.

When the men had withdrawn all was silent, save for Hannah's groans for the space of a few minutes, and then he heard the door open again and a stealthy, gliding, cat-like footstep coming across the room.

The newcomer stopped at the bedside, and soon Thad heard the soft, soothing tones of a woman's voice, intermingled at intervals with old Hannah's gruff accents, and he recognized the more refined speech as that of Mrs. Sutter.

She appeared to have brought some remedy, which she was trying to persuade Hannah to allow her to apply, and which the latter was resisting with characteristic stubbornness.

A long and tedious discussion followed, and at last the weaker woman appeared to have won, for he could hear her seemingly applying the remedy.

Then for a few minutes all was hushed, and by attentive listening Thad caught the heavy breathing of the injured woman and knew that she had been soothed, probably by some opiate, into slumber. He also imagined that the other woman had left the room, and was just considering the feasibility of stealing out of his unpleasant place of confinement and attempting his escape from the house.

But he was deterred from action by the sound of a muffled footstep close to the closet door, and quickly following it the sound of a hand upon the latch.

Before he had time for a second thought the door was pulled open and the corpse-like woman stood before him.

Standing there with a cocked revolver in each hand, it would have been expected that he would have given such fright to this weak woman as to have caused her to go into hysterics or scream at the very least.

But she did neither. In fact, her coolness seemed to imply that she had expected to find just what she had found, and instead of any look of terror on her face, she smiled faintly, and said, in a soft, barely audible voice:

"You would persist in getting into the trap again in spite of my advice. Well, it is too late to talk of that now. The only thing to be done now is to get out of here, if possible. Come."

Thad was greatly impressed with the woman's solicitude for his welfare, and greatly amazed that she should have penetrated his disguise.

Without a word he stepped out of the closet, and as the woman started for the door, he followed her.

As he passed the bed upon which old Hannah lay, he stole a glance at the hard, sinister face, now somewhat pale and haggard, but still grim and devilish in appearance.

When they reached the passage the woman stole along with her customary cat-like tread, only pausing for an instant as they passed the stairway to glance up and listen, and then moved noiselessly on.

Thad also listened, and could hear coarse, angry voices and heavy footsteps on the floor above.

At the termination of the passage they descended another stairway, at the foot of which the woman opened a door, and, turning to Thad, said:

"Go that way. Save yourself, if you can. I have done all I can for you, and if you get out alive, don't attempt to come back here again."

CHAPTER XIX.

A TERRIBLE SACRIFICE.

Thad hesitated before passing through the door which the woman had thrown open for him.

In the first place, he was reluctant to leave the place while his friend was still in jeopardy, and in the second place, it was a plunge in the dark at best.

He had no conception where the course would lead him, and the woman's admonition to save himself if he could fore-shadowed danger in that direction.

As he hesitated he cast a glance so full

of inquiry at the woman that she at once interpreted its meaning, and hastened to say:

"When I told you to go this way and save yourself if you could, I meant you to understand that your chances in this direction are greater than in any other. I do not apprehend that you will meet any obstacles in going this way, though you may. In remaining and taking your chances with the men I know there is no hope for you. Take your choice."

With that she turned and walked away before the detective had time for reply.

He was in a sad dilemma. But while he was still ruminating which course to take the sound of footsteps was heard on the stairs above, and, glancing up, he saw the light descending.

Now he realized that there was not a second of time to be lost, for the men were coming down in search of him.

But as he glanced up again and saw that there were six men, each armed with a revolver, and that held in the hand ready for action, he decided that the better part of valor was discretion, and glided out of the door.

This led into another passage, equally as dark as the other, but in addition to darkness it was exceedingly damp and smelt like a cellar or subterranean passage.

He hurried along with a quickened pace now, hoping to soon reach the outer world, and when he had walked for some distance he glanced back toward the door, which he had left open, and saw that the men had already arrived at it and the light which they carried illuminated the passage for a short distance.

Quickening his pace into almost a run, a moment's dash brought him to the end of the passage, at least to a door.

The passage had grown damper and damper, until the last few yards of it the floor was covered with water.

He tried the door, but it was locked. What was to be done?

The structure did not appear to be very strong and he could have broken it down if he had had time enough, but as he looked he saw that his pursuers were more than half-way along the passage, and in another minute would reach him.

He made one desperate dash at the door, but it stubbornly resisted his attack and he saw that escape was impossible in that direction.

He wondered why the woman, who appeared to wish his escape, should have sent him this way, when she must have known that he could not get out.

Every second was bringing the men nearer and increasing his peril.

Thus far it was evident that they had not got sight of him, and in a moment of desperation or vain hope he glanced about the gloomy passage.

The light carried by the approaching men penetrated far enough by this time to dispel the blackest of the gloom that surrounded him, and he saw that there was a window on one side of the passage.

It was some four feet from the floor and only about two feet square, but it was enough under these desperate circumstances.

Pulling his slouch hat well down over his eyes to protect his face, he made a mighty spring into the air, something like an acrobat at a circus, and vaulted through the window, carrying sash, glass and all with him.

He had taken no account of his probable landing place, and the next instant was treated to a surprise, for he found himself neck-deep in water.

The shock startled him somewhat, but being an excellent swimmer, he struck out with all his energy and soon ran up against a stone wall.

Groping along the wall with his hands, he at length came to a flight of stone steps.

They were wet and slimy, but he contrived to climb upon them and began to ascend.

There were only half a dozen steps to climb, and then his head came in contact with the floor above.

Believing that he was in a cellar, and that what he felt above him was a trap-door, he placed his back under it and attempted to lift it, but in vain. The door was bolted down from the outside.

Meanwhile the men had arrived at the end of the corridor, and had doubtless witnessed his heroic jump, for there was a light at the broken window and several faces were peering down into the dark waters.

"He's probably drowned," one said, at length.

"That is it," coincided another.

"Not a bit of it," objected a third.

"He's probably swam across and climbed up the steps."

"Can he escape that way?" asked the first speaker.

"No. The trap is fastened down."

"Better leave him there. He'll soon die of the dampness and cold."

"No, I'll leave a couple of you here to guard the window to see that he doesn't escape this way, and the rest of us will go around and let him up where we can take care of him."

This speaker Thad recognized as Sutter.

The voices ceased now, and Thad felt that hope was at an end.

Escape was perfectly impossible, and now that he had got his revolvers wet, ten chances to one not a single barrel would go off, so that, with the exception of his knife, he was utterly powerless to defend himself against his powerful foe.

In his desperation he made another heroic effort to raise the trap, surging with all the strength he possessed, but it was no use. He realized the futility of wasting his energy in so hopeless a cause, and sat down upon the wet step to await his fate.

Scarcely had he done so when he heard some one walking over his head.

Knowing that it must be his jailors, he wondered how they could have got round that distance in so brief a time.

But then he noticed that there seemed to be but one person. He did not give this coincident much thought, however, for whoever the person was had already begun to work at the fastening of the trap, and a moment later the door was raised.

To his surprise no light was revealed by the lifting of the door, and he began to hope that it might be his former deliverer, the weakly woman.

However, he did not wait to speculate upon who his deliverer was, but sprang up the remaining distance and found himself on the floor of the room which had been above him.

He stood face to face with his deliverer, but it was too dark to discern who it was. And then the person spoke.

"Who is it?"

"It is I. Thank God!"

And the two men were in each other's arms in an instant.

It was none other than Horace Lemreaux.

"How did you get down into that place?" questioned the young man.

"It is too long a story. Let us think about how we are to get out of here."

"That is a vain hope. We might as well try to escape from the Bastille as to even dream of escaping from here."

"Then we must stand together and fight for it when they come."

"Are they coming?"

"Yes, they think I am still in that accursed cellar, and they are coming round to take me out. When they open the door we must make a dash for them and sell our lives as dearly as possible."

"You have your pistols?"

"Yes, but they are as wet as seaweed, and as useless as cornstalks. We must depend upon the weapons nature gave us, and this," pursued the detective, taking out his bowie knife. "I imagine I can do a little execution at close quarters with that, though."

"And the revolvers—let me have one of them," interposed Lemreaux. "If I cannot kill, perhaps I can scare with it."

"That is true, and there is no telling luck may be with us to the extent of some of the cartridges being dry enough to explode. But here they come. Be ready

for them and give them a warm reception."

Then a happy thought struck Thad.

"Up with the trap," he said. "Perhaps we can manage to push some of them into it."

The trap-door was quickly raised, and the two men again put themselves in readiness for the siege.

They had hardly done so when the rattle of a key was heard in the lock of the door.

The next instant the door was thrown open, and the four remaining men stood in the doorway.

One carried the lantern and held it above his head in order to illuminate the interior of the room.

Thad and his companion stood well back in the room, so that the light from the point it was held did not fall upon them, and the men hesitated, as if being in doubt as to whether the prisoners had not escaped.

Just then their eyes fell upon the open trap, and they all with one accord looked down.

This was our friends' opportunity, and Thad gave the signal by a slight nudge, and both men raised the pistols, hazarding the chances of their going off, and snapped—but the pistols did not go off.

This did not discourage them, however, for the instant they had pulled the trigger and found that their weapons were useless, they made a sudden dash upon the men at the door, Lemreaux using his revolver clubbed, and Thad using his in the same manner, and in addition, his knife.

So sudden and terrible was the onslaught that the outlaws were panic-stricken.

Thad had managed to knock the light out at the first blow, leaving the place in darkness, and with a random stroke with his knife had caused at least one man to drop and yell with pain.

What more execution was done could only be guessed at, for, in accordance with their plan, having delivered a few swift blows and mowed their way to the outside of the door, they did what was unquestionably the wisest thing under the circumstances—took to their heels and ran.

A sharp run of a few seconds brought them to a door, which Thad concluded led to the outside, and he made an attempt to open it, but unfortunately it was locked.

He was not to be balked by that, however, and proceeded to smash the lock.

But this was a slow and uncertain business, and by this time the men had recovered from their panic and started after them. Just then Lemreaux noticed a door near at hand and said:

"This way."

With that he opened the door and darted through. Thad followed, and found himself in a room which opened into the yard.

Hastening to one of the windows Thad threw it up and jumped out.

Lemreaux started to follow his example, but at that instant the men arrived at the door, and, taking their bearings from the noise the detective had made in jumping out, fired a volley in that direction.

With a cry of pain Lemreaux fell back from the window which he was half out of, and sank to the floor.

CHAPTER XX.

DETERMINED ACTION.

On landing, Thad found himself in the front yard, and scarcely had he struck the ground when the big dog came at him with the apparent intention of eating him alive.

But the detective was in too desperate a frame of mind to think of retreating now.

He stood his ground coolly, and when the dog came near enough, slashed him with his knife.

The wound was not serious enough to kill the animal, but it was sufficient to send him howling away.

Concealing himself in the shadow of the house, Thad stopped to consider the best thing to be done.

In his present wrought-up state, if he had been properly armed, he would have

returned to the fray and rescued his friend at the expense of his own life.

But he could not shut his eyes to the folly of attempting to cope with this crowd, unarmed as he was.

There was, therefore, but one thing to be done, and that was to procure assistance and raid the house.

He had sufficient evidence already to justify this, and as soon as he had conceived the idea he put off for the house of his friend Watson.

The doctor had long since gone to bed, but Thad roused him out and related his terrible experience to him.

"Then there is no longer any doubt, you think, of Sutter's guilt?" said the doctor.

"Not the least. I not only believe him to have been guilty of the murder of young Howarth, but I believe him capable of murdering our young friend Lemreaux, if we do not succeed in rescuing him."

"What is your plan?"

"I think the better way will be to collect a number of the neighbors and raid the house to-morrow. You see the matter is urgent. There is no telling what they may do to our young friend between now and to-morrow."

"You are right. And from the way the neighbors feel toward Sutter it won't take long to get up a committee."

So Tom was roused out of his couch, and he, Thad and Watson, set out to collect a posse of the neighbors.

In the course of a couple of hours a crowd of fifty or sixty men had been assembled, all armed with such weapons as they could get hold of, varying all the way from Winchester rifles and revolvers to pitchforks.

The detective drew them up in line in Watson's front yard and gave them their instructions, after which he marched them down the hill to Sutter's house.

The house was again in darkness by this time (it was only a little while before daylight) and as quiet as the grave.

After stationing guards on three sides of the building, Thad took four of what he considered the trustiest men and led the way to the front door.

Here he boldly knocked, and, receiving no response, repeated the summons several times. Still there was no sign of life within, and, turning to his men, he said:

"We shall have to break the door down, gentlemen. Get a pole or something to serve as a battering-ram."

Some of the men, who were mostly farmers, went away to look for the desired article, and while Thad was waiting for them to return, to his great surprise the door was quietly opened.

It was too dark for him to discern who the person was, and drew his revolver, ready for action.

But he was saved the trouble of using it, for at that moment the person spoke:

"Who is it and what do you want?"

The voice was that of Mrs. Sutter, and she spoke in her gentlest tone.

In view of the assistance she had rendered him on the two occasions, the detective was somewhat loth about stating his business, and she, anticipating him, went on:

"If you are after my husband—which I presume you are—you will not find him here. He left over an hour ago—he and the rest of the men."

This woman had always acted honestly with him, and her tone now bore the stamp of truth; still Thad was not satisfied, and told her so, in as delicate a manner as possible.

"Very well, you are perfectly welcome to come in and search the house if you wish, but you will have your trouble for nothing."

If he was reluctant before, he was doubly so now, and doubtless would have withdrawn and taken her word for it had it not been for Watson, who stepped up and whispered in his ear:

"Don't believe a word of it. It's an old game. She's a bigger liar than he is."

This served as a balm to Thad's conscience, and he said, in a kindly tone, however:

"I am very sorry to inconvenience you,

madam, especially after all your kindness to me, but I must do my duty."

The woman bowed her head and allowed the five men (the two who had gone for the battering ram having returned) to pass in.

Then commenced a tedious search. First the ground floor was examined, room by room. Then the second floor in the same manner. And then the third, and finally the turret.

But all to no purpose. Not a living being, besides Mrs. Sutter, was to be found on the premises.

It was all very mysterious.

Where could they have taken poor Lemreaux, who was wounded, and could not, in all probability, travel without being carried?

And then a horrible suggestion came to him. Probably poor Lemreaux had been killed by the shot which had caused him to fall back from the window.

In such an event Thad guessed pretty well where they would stow the body, and his mind reverted at once to the water-filled cellar.

At this point a ray of hope entered the detective's bosom. He remembered that they had confined poor Lemreaux in this room before. Why shouldn't they have him confined there now?

Another search was made with a view to discovering a way that led to this room, but in vain.

Then it was that Thad discovered that the corridors of this house were a perplexing maze, and that it was almost impossible for a stranger to find his way about.

At length he despaired of finding the room himself, and sought the woman to ask her to direct him. But when he came to look for her, she had also disappeared.

This brought old Hannah to mind, and he wondered how they had managed to move her in her bruised condition. And then he decided that none of them had moved, that they were all still in the house, but he was defeated in his attempt to find them by the peculiar construction of the establishment.

Finally a new idea came to his relief.

He remembered the window at the back of the house at which he had first seen Mrs. Sutter. Perhaps he would find her there again.

But when he went to the back of the house he found the window as dark as the rest of the building and no sign of the woman there.

But as he reconnoitered about the swampy back yard he made another and more important discovery.

He had noticed on his previous visits a long addition, which ran back from the house far into the swamp.

This he had always imagined to be a kitchen or something of the kind, but now it struck him that it resembled the long corridor through which he had passed before making his escape into the flooded cellar in the earlier part of the night.

Ordering his men to follow him, he plunged into the water and waded out to the end of the addition, although it was nearly waist deep, and was gratified to find the door in the end unlocked.

"This," he mused, "is the way the men made their escape, if they have escaped."

With his four men following him, Thad passed into the corridor.

Having provided himself with a dark-lantern this time, he shot the slide as soon as he got inside and looked around him.

There was the window which he had smashed in jumping through, and his first impulse was to go through that way and make his way up into the room from the cellar, but he remembered that the men had gone from this same passage round to the door of the room, and determined to try that way first.

"Keep right along the passage, boys," he said, "and see where it will lead us to."

A few moments' tramp brought them to a door, and when the detective flashed his light upon it, he felt certain that it was the same door to which the woman had led him and told him to save his life if he could.

He tried the door, and, finding it locked, turned to his men with the declaration:

"Got to smash it, boys."

With that they formed a line some distance back from the door, and then all came at it, one upon the other.

The combined weight of the five men was too much for the frail door, and it flew open.

Their way was comparatively clear now.

A short corridor which ran at right angles led them into another long one, and this Thad recollected as the one into which he and Lemreaux had escaped after their fight with the gang.

Pushing along to the end of this passage, he found the door to the little room where he had found his friend before.

The door of this room was also locked, and from the appearance it would be a more serious job to break it down.

Nevertheless, they backed off as before and came at it like a catapult. But it was of no use. The door resisted their most heroic efforts.

Thad was in despair of getting into the room, although now that he had found it locked, he was more anxious than ever to get in, feeling sure that his friend was confined therein.

He turned away, but, true to his detective instinct, threw the light of his lantern over the surrounding wall in the hope of discovering some other entrance to the apartment, when to his surprise and delight he saw a key hanging upon the wall at the side of the door.

Instinctively he knew that it belonged to the door, and, snatching it down, put it into the lock. It fit and he turned the bolt and opened the door.

Thad flashed his light inside and surveyed the damp, wretched little room.

There, in one corner, apparently dead, sat huddled in a bunch, his young friend Horace Lemreaux.

Hurrying to his side, the detective shook the young man vigorously and called:

"Come, my boy, get up. We've come to rescue you. What is the matter? Can't you rise?"

But the poor fellow, whose head was sunk upon his breast, only moaned feebly and did not stir.

"He is evidently under the influence of some sort of narcotic," suggested Watson, who had come to the side of the detective. "Let me administer an antidote."

The doctor took a small vial from his pocket and, with the detective's assistance, poured a few drops down the young man's throat.

This soon caused him to revive, and then it was discovered that he was fastened to the floor by means of a small steel chain, which was placed around his waist and attached to a ring.

"The fiends had dosed him, chained him to the floor and left him to die like a wild beast," muttered Thad.

CHAPTER XXI.

A RICH FIND.

Although the chain which bound young Lemreaux to the floor of his dismal prison was diminutive in size, it was remarkably strong—so much so that it took the combined strength of Thad and his four companions to break it.

Lemreaux was lifted upon his feet, but he was weak from the influence of the drug which had been forced upon him, and so chilled by the damp atmosphere of the room that he could hardly stand.

He was led into another room, and, after a good draught of brandy and some vigorous rubbing by his friends, he at last recovered a portion of his normal state.

Then Thad began to question him.

"How long have you been in there?"

"I cannot tell. It seems ages. The shot which I received as I was attempting to follow you out of the window, while not injuring me very much, rendered me unconscious for some moments, and when I came to I found myself lying on the floor and they were fastening the chain about my waist. As soon as I opened my eyes, Sutter said: 'He's recovering consciousness. This will never do. He will hear too much. Give him a dose.' And then they held me and poured some sort of stuff

down my throat which soon rendered me unconscious again, and that is the last I remember until I looked up and saw your face."

"Where did the ball strike you?" questioned Thad, anxiously. "Are you wounded?"

"No. That is, not to amount to anything. You see, the ball struck me in the breast, and a thick pocket-book which I carried in my breast-pocket glanced the ball. The concussion, being directly over my heart, rendered me unconscious, however, and the place still feels a little sore."

"Well, old fellow, I'm glad you came out so well. But what have you learned by your adventure?"

"Nothing. Except that I am a precious fool for venturing into the lion's den as I did."

"You learned nothing which will be of any use to us, then?"

"Not a thing."

"Not even enough to found a suspicion that this man and his gang were guilty of or accessory to, the murder and robbery of Howarth?"

"Oh, yes, so far as suspicion goes. In fact, from what I saw and heard, I haven't the slightest doubt of their guilt, but it will be another thing to prove it. Where are they now, and how did you get in here?" he broke off suddenly, looking about him with a dazed expression.

"As to your first question, I was about to ask you that," replied Thad. "We have no idea where they have gone. As to getting in, the woman of the house let us in at the front door."

"Then you may be sure that Sutter has gone."

"And old Hannah, too, I presume."

"I don't know as to that. For, as I told you, I know nothing of what occurred after they administered the drug to me."

There was a couch in the room into which they had brought the young man, and Thad insisted upon his lying down upon this and resting for a little while, while he and his men made another search of the house.

They explored, as far as they knew, every nook and cranny of the establishment, but with the same result as before. Not a living being, even Mrs. Sutter, this time, was to be found.

Despairing at last of finding any of the gang on the premises, the detective returned with his men to the room in which they had left Lemreaux, when, to their great surprise, they found Mrs. Sutter sitting there and talking with him.

"Why, where did you come from?" demanded Thad, addressing the woman.

She looked up in her meek way, and answered, in her peculiar, gentle voice:

"From my room, sir."

"Where is your room?"

"Over there," she said, with an inclination of her head.

"It must be reached only by some secret passage, for we have reconnoitered the house from top to bottom twice over, and did not come upon it."

"I have no doubt you thought you had been in all the rooms in the house, but it is possible there may be several which you have not found yet."

"In that case, it is possible that your husband and his gang may still be in the house."

"No, that is not possible. I know that they went away soon after your escape through the window."

"How did they manage to get Hannah away?"

The woman looked a little startled at this question, but finally answered:

"I presume Hannah went of her own accord. She usually did about as she pleased."

"But I imagined she was too badly hurt to permit her to travel."

"Oh, I do not know about that. Hannah is very rugged. The fall would have killed me. But I am so frail and worthless."

While the woman was speaking a new thought came to the detective.

The cellar! Was it not possible that the men might have secreted themselves in there, pending the search of the house?

Without mentioning where he was going,

but merely excusing himself for a few moments, Thad left the room.

Once outside, he lost no time in making his way to the little room where Lemreaux had been confined.

A glance at the trap-door dispelled all thought of the men being concealed in the cellar, for it was bolted down from the outside, as usual. This could not be if the men were on the inside.

Nevertheless, he slid the bolt and raised the trap.

All was quiet and darkness below, but somehow he felt an anxiety to go down and investigate the place, now that he had a light.

Descending the slippery steps with great caution, he shot the slide of his lantern and surveyed his surroundings.

Nothing but stagnant water was at first visible, but as he moved the light about from one portion of the vault to another his eyes fell upon a strange object, and one that gave him a thrill of mingled surprise and pleasure.

At one side and close to the steps was what appeared to be a small table, the legs standing on the floor of the cellar, and the top just above the level of the water.

On this table stood a small valise, either the identical one or the counterpart of it that he had seen Hannah and Tom Gillam carrying on the night of his first visit to the sumach bushes.

With a feeling of mingled awe and delight Thad reached out and grasped the handle of the valise, but when he came to lift it he found it to be no trivial matter.

From his position on the slippery steps it required about all the strength he possessed to lift it from the table to the steps where he stood.

He did not stop to open or investigate the article just then, but after making another careful survey of the cellar, took up the satchel and ascended to the room above.

His first impulse—so enthusiastic was he over his find—was to rush back to the room where he had left his friends and announce the discovery. But upon cooler deliberation he concluded that it would be better to keep the matter from the woman.

This decision was brought about by the thought that as long as Sutter supposed his treasure still remained in the cellar he was likely to return for it, which would give the detective an opportunity to capture him.

So he simply took the valise into the hall and sat it down, and then went in and announced his readiness to depart.

"There is no use of remaining here any longer," said he. "I am satisfied that the men are not here, so we may as well go home."

Lemreaux had regained his strength sufficiently to walk by this time, and the party left the house, Thad leading the way and keeping the bag concealed until he was out of sight of the place.

Watson and Lemreaux were curious to know what he was carrying, covered with a mantle which he had picked up in the house, but the detective kept them in ignorance until they had reached the road, and then threw the mantle off, exhibiting the valise.

It was broad daylight by this time, and the whole party gathered about to survey the treasure.

"What is it?" gasped Watson, at last.

"From the weight of it, I should judge that it was something worth while," said Thad.

At that moment Tom Gillam came up. Bending over and peering at the object, which was sitting in the road, he drew a long breath and drawled:

"Wal, by hoaky! if that ain't the same bag that me an' old Hannah carried away from the sumachs!"

"I guess you are right, Tom," said Thad. "And, as you surmised, I guess it contains sparklers and yellow boys."

"Guess I'd better help ye carry it, hadn't I?"

"Yes, I wish you would."

When the party reached Watson's house Thad dismissed the farmers who had assisted in the raid, thanking them for their kindness, and then took his treasure into the house for investigation.

When the bag was opened it was found to contain an immense amount of gold and silver bullion, probably taken from various places, and some of it having been hoarded away in the damp house so long that it had gathered mildew.

There was also a large collection of gems of various kinds and qualities.

Thad had a list of the jewelry stolen at the Cartright reception, and was not long in identifying every piece of it in this collection, but there was a great deal that he knew nothing about, and would have to turn over to the authorities at Long Island City to have advertised and identified.

But in all this there was nothing to indicate who the robbers were, beyond the supposition that Sutter was one of them.

"Well, Thad," said Watson, when they were through examining the treasure and had closed the bag, "we have the booty, the next thing is to find the robbers."

"That is not going to be as difficult a matter now as you think," said Thad.

"How so?"

"The dog always returns to his bone, they say. These fellows have given us the slip temporarily, but, depend upon it, they will come back for the booty."

"Then you think that all that remains is to watch for them, or, in other words, watch the place where the booty was concealed, to catch the thieves?"

"That is it, exactly."

"I have a theory, which I do not know ever occurred to you or not."

"What is that?"

"I believe that woman knows more about these matters than she cares to tell. In other words, I believe she is a sly worker in the interest of the gang."

"I have thought as much myself several times, but she has such an innocent way about her that she always succeeds in disarming me as soon as she begins to talk."

"I notice that she has an innocent way of expressing herself, but I suspect there is something behind all this."

"What could be her object in rescuing me, and of letting us into the house?"

"To throw us off our guard, most likely."

"It does seem strange that she should remain when the others have gone."

CHAPTER XXII.

TOM GILLAM'S RUSE.

As it was long after daylight when Thad and his friends reached Watson's house, and he was greatly fatigued, he put in a good part of the day in sleeping.

Late in the afternoon, disguised as a farmer, he strolled down the hill, along the road to the farther limits of Sutter's grounds, and made his way along the edge of the swamp to the house.

He had little expectation of finding anybody about the premises at this time of day.

If the fugitives returned it would be after dark.

It was with no little surprise, therefore, that, as he neared the corner of the building facing the swamp, the notes of a violin again fell upon his ear.

The performer was evidently an exquisite musician, and the air, which was a sad sort of refrain, seemed like the wail of some sorrowful spirit.

Thad associated the melody at once with the wretched, ghost-like woman.

It seemed like nothing so much as the expression of her melancholy as it appeared in her sad face.

Thad was deeply affected, and it was with some compunction that he persuaded himself to abandon the search for the time.

But as the music continued, he could not resist attempting to get a glimpse of the player.

With this object he moved around to the front of the house.

Although it was still daylight, the light of a lamp could be seen faintly reflected on the closed shutters, the slats of which were partly turned.

By stooping and peering through between the bars he had a good view of the interior of the room.

The violinist sat near the end of the

room, and was playing without notes, and appeared to be completely absorbed in the theme.

But it was not the woman, but Sutter himself.

Thad stood contemplating the man for several minutes in admiration and wonder.

It was astonishing that a man with such talent as this could be the villain his deeds had shown him to be, and he was equally astonished that he should have had the temerity to return after the whole neighborhood had become stirred up against him.

Still the music went on, and every moment the detective was growing more tender and less inclined to arrest a man who could produce such touching melody.

But at length he came to a realization of his situation.

The sense of his duty came to him, and at the same time the recollection of this man's past deeds of crime.

And the detective determined to act.

But how should he proceed?

The thought had scarcely flashed through his mind when he heard a light footstep almost at his side, and, looking up, beheld his two friends and allies, Lemreaux and Tom Gillam.

They had evidently made their way into the grounds in the same way that the detective had, for they were splashed with mud and water almost up to the waist.

Thad was delighted to see them.

"Just in the nick of time, boys!" he whispered, enthusiastically. "If we work it right we have the game dead to rights."

Meanwhile the two new-comers had stopped and were listening with rapt attention to the soft, enchanting notes of the violin.

"Who is that playing?" questioned Lemreaux, without paying much attention to Thad's words.

"That is he," replied the detective.

"My God!" gasped the other, "is it possible that that villain has all that music in his soul?"

"Oh, he's a bully fiddler," put in Tom. "I've heered him lots o' times."

Even then Lemreaux was incredulous, and whispered:

"Are you sure it is he? The sweet, sad notes are more suggestive of that poor wretch of a woman."

"That is exactly how it appealed to me, until I had satisfied myself."

"You have seen him, then?"

"Yes. Just stoop and take a peep behind those blind-bars."

Lemreaux did as requested, and after a prolonged peep, raised himself, glanced at the detective, drew a long breath, and said:

"Can it be possible that this is the same man who has led this vicious gang to so many deeds of crime? I can hardly believe it."

"It is hard to believe," answered Thad, "but the circumstances compel us to believe it. By the way, we are wasting time. Let us get to work."

"What shall we do?"

"There are but three of us, and we must make the most of our numbers. Suppose you go to the back of the house, station yourself in the shadow (it is growing dark enough now to permit of such a thing), and Tom and I will make the raid from the front."

Lemreaux started for the rear of the house, when Thad called to him:

"Are you armed, my boy?"

Lemreaux exhibited a couple of revolvers, with the smiling observation:

"I never get into a scrape like this without those chaps."

"You'll do," laughed the detective.

"Now if this fellow tries to make his escape, there is but one thing to do—if he won't stop and surrender at your command—drop him."

"Drop him is the word," echoed the young man.

Allowing Lemreaux time to station himself, Thad turned to Tom and said:

"Now, my boy, to work!"

"What's to do?"

"We'll go to the front door, demand admittance, and as soon as the door is opened make a rush for our man."

"Ye'll never git him that way, sir."

"Why?"

"'Cause the moment he hears a noise he'll drop outer sight quicker'n a lightnin' bug when it drops in a pond. Better slip in."

"How is that to be done?"

"Ye know when I come to see Bettie, I don't like for the rest of the folks to know I'm about, so—"

"You have a private entrance, eh?"

"Not exactly private, but 'tain't the way the folks of the house gen'rally goes."

"Very well, that is the way for us, Tom. You know the route. Lead on, and I will follow."

Without further parley Tom strode off round the house, but in a different direction from that which Lemreaux had taken.

It had grown sufficiently dusk by this time to allow them to move about with tolerable security, provided nobody was watching them, which Thad had no reason to suspect just now.

At length Tom reached the opposite end of the house, and turned into what looked like an arbor.

Pulling open a door, which was constructed of lattice-work, and so completely covered with vines as to disguise the fact that it was a door, Tom beckoned his companion to follow him, and passed in.

The detective followed, and soon found himself in a sort of hall, which, unlike all the other ground floor entrances he had seen hitherto, was comparatively dry, and had not that damp smell peculiar to the rest of the house.

Tom pushed on through another door and came into a large but scantily furnished room, and, to the detective's great surprise, a demure little woman sat by a window at one end of the room, sewing by the dim light that scarcely sufficed to reveal her own features.

She looked up on Tom's entrance, smiled faintly, and said, in a gentle little voice:

"Oh, is that you, Tom? I thought it was only—"

At that moment she caught sight of Thad, who had been partially concealed behind Tom, and whom she had not noticed in the shadow, and ceased speaking.

Tom, seeing her confusion, laughed and hastened to say:

"This here's a frien' o' mine, Bettie. His name's Jones, an' he's a rich farmer, an' he didn't know but he might be able to hire ye to come an' live to his house, as he wants a hired girl bad, and pays big wages."

Thad was somewhat dumfounded at this outburst of eloquence on Tom's part. He could never have given him credit for so much invention, and that on the spur of the moment.

But, while Tom's invention served the purpose of accounting for his presence, it complicated matters in another direction.

It would involve a good deal of invention on the detective's part in order to appear consistent with Tom's story.

He bowed to the young woman as nearly like a farmer would have done as he knew how, and was about to begin a harangue about losing his other girl, or something to that effect, when the resourceful Tom came to his relief with:

"But jist now, Bettie, my honeysuckle, my hayseed frien' has business with the gov'n'r."

And with that the young man opened another door with as much coolness and familiarity as if he belonged there.

The girl looked up with an expression of alarm, Thad thought, and said:

"I don't think you'd better go up there, Tom."

"Why, my morning-glory?"

"Because, for one thing, what will he say to anybody coming to see him by way of the kitchen? And then he's give orders to all the help not to let anybody in the house."

"That's all right, Bettie, my night-bloomin'-seriusness," interposed the young man, returning to the window and bestowing a sounding kiss on the girl's cheek. "The gov'n'r's a little off his oats jist now, an' wants ter sell out, so I've fetched this old fodder-lifter to him."

"Does Mr. Sutter expect him?"

"Expect 'im? 'Course he does. He's jist wearin' his noble heart out with pinin' an' unrequited longin' to see 'im. Come on, Mr. Robinson."

And he pushed the door open once more and passed through.

The door led into a hallway, and soon the two men were ascending a flight of stairs.

It was very dark in the stairway, and when Tom opened a door at the top, very little light was admitted.

But something more delightful than light was admitted, and that was the notes of the violin.

From the sound Thad guessed that the player could not be far off, and when he had reached the hall at the top of the stairs, he found that the room where the musician was opened off from it.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A DESPERATE STRUGGLE.

It was with a strange state of feelings that Thad approached the sitting-room door which separated him from the man whom he had sought so long and ardently.

Stooping, he peeped through the keyhole, but, although a great part of the room was visible, the violinist was out of the range of his vision.

Still the delicious strains rose and fell, and every second the detective found that it was stealing upon his senses and weakening his resolution.

At length he suddenly aroused himself with a desperate effort, threw off the lethargy which was taking possession of him, and put his hand on the knob.

Turning to his companion, he beckoned him to be in readiness for the impending struggle, and drew his own revolver.

Tom stepped to his side, and Thad could see by the firm expression in the boy's face that he could depend upon him.

Then he softly turned the knob.

Luck favored him, for the door was not locked, and yielded to his pressure.

The next instant Thad, with Tom at his heels, stood in the room—in the presence of the ravishing violinist.

And at the same instant the music ceased, and the performer looked up, curiously, but with no sign of surprise or agitation.

And Thad saw before him—not Sutter, whom he had expected to find, but the weak little woman, Sutter's wife!

She stared at the detective and Tom in turn, with her accustomed quiet, helpless expression, meanwhile letting the violin drop upon her lap in a weary sort of way.

With a swift glance the detective surveyed the room in every part, and then, returning his gaze to the pale face of the woman, he inquired:

"Where is he?"

"He is not here," she replied promptly, without any attempt at dissimulation.

"I see that he is not here," retorted Thad, shortly, "but he was here just this moment, and I want to know where he has gone to."

"That I cannot tell you, sir, and you are mistaken about him being here just this minute—it has been some time since he left."

"He must be concealed about this room," insisted the detective, again casting his eyes over the apartment.

The woman made no reply, but followed his eyes with her own.

Thad stepped to a corner where hung a heavy curtain, and lifted it.

Finding nothing there, he peered behind a screen, behind the window curtains, and finally behind the piano.

But his search was all in vain. Nobody was there.

The woman had watched him throughout with an expression of rapt interest, but not the least indication of derision, and when he again returned to her and paused in front of her with an expectant look, she heaved a deep sigh without looking up, and murmured:

"I knew you would have your trouble for nothing, sir."

"Very likely," retorted the exasperated detective, sharply, "and you are doubtless well aware where the person for whom I have been looking can be found."

"Yes, I have a pretty good idea where he could be found."

"And yet you said just now that you could not tell where he was."

"Yes, that is what I said. While I have a very good idea where he can be found, as I said before, I cannot tell."

The appealing look which she bestowed upon him as she uttered this sentence expressed all she wished to convey, and Thad understood it as plainly as if she had told him in words how she dared not, with her poor life, divulge the hiding-place of her wicked husband.

And he now saw through the clever ruse of the outlaw, in substituting his wife for himself at the violin, in time to allow himself to escape.

Disappointed and disgusted that this clever scoundrel should have fooled him again, Thad rushed from the room, determined to embark once more upon the hopeless task of attempting to search this mysterious labyrinth of a house.

He could not but realize the hopelessness of the task, as he thought of the passages and rooms which he had passed through in entering the house on this occasion, and which had never appeared to him at all during his previous searches.

As he ruminated these questions he had walked absent-mindedly to the rear of the hall.

Here there was a window looking out upon the swamp, but latticed over with iron bars like a prison.

As he neared the window the furious barking of a dog suddenly broke upon his ear, and he peered out into the now thickly gathering gloom to ascertain the cause.

As he did so the sound of splashing water also came to him.

Then, as his eyes became accustomed to the darkness, a thrilling scene, barely discernible in the dim light, broke upon him.

There, submerged almost to their arm-pits in the water, were Sutter and young Lemreaux, clinched in each other's embrace and struggling for the mastery.

There seemed little to choose between them in the matter of physical strength.

Lemreaux was probably the more active of the two, but, in addition to competing with his antagonist, he was obliged to defend himself from the repeated attacks of the dog, who was plunging about in the water, watching his opportunity to attack the young man, and when it offered, make a lunge for him.

Lemreaux had evidently already suffered considerably from these onslaughts, for his clothes, as far as could be seen of them, were in ribbons.

He, therefore, saw the necessity of keeping the dog at bay as well as he could without allowing his human antagonist to get the advantage of him.

Thad caught all this at a glimpse, and realized the situation.

His only object now was to reach his friend and lend the power of his own strong arm.

As he was about to turn from the window he came face to face with Tom Gilham, whose presence he had forgotten for the moment.

The two men exchanged glances, and then Thad, seeing that his friend had seen it all, said:

"Tom, we must get out there as quickly as possible."

Without a word, and with a serious face, Tom turned and started along the hall, and Thad followed.

Presently Tom turned off on a narrow passage, which, in the darkness, the detective had not seen.

Along this he continued for some distance, and Thad noticed that the floor was growing damper and damper as they proceeded.

At length they came to a door, and the young man, turning to the detective, said:

"Here is going to be our toughest pull—if it happens—"

"If what happens?"

"If it happens that the guards are on hand."

"Then why did we not go the other way?"

"What other way?"

"The way we came in."

"We would not be able to reach them from that course without going a very long way round."

"Then open the door!" commanded Thad, impatiently. "Let us have an end of it as soon as possible. We must reach Lemreaux before it is too late."

Without further questioning Tom threw open the door, and the two rushed through. As Tom had prophesied, the guards were there.

At least, there were three or four men, who sprang up from seats about a table, but they appeared to be in no condition to dispute the passage of our friends, for, so far as could be seen, they were unarmed, and when Thad and Tom leveled their revolvers upon them they started to run.

They scampered to a door leading off from the room, hustled through, falling over each other as they went, and finally disappearing.

The detective made no attempt to detain or follow them, as he was too much interested in getting out to his friend.

"Which way now, Tom?" he asked, as soon as the men had disappeared.

"This way, sir."

And the young man strode across the room and opened another door.

Thad was not long in hurrying through it, and was gratified to find himself out of doors.

He stopped to listen to get his bearings, and discovered that he was but a short distance from the combatants, as the barking of the dog and the splashing of the water indicated.

Hurrying along in the direction, he soon turned the corner of the house, where he came upon the scene of the struggle.

The combatants were some twenty feet from the shore, and Thad could see that Lemreaux was getting the worst of it, owing to his being compelled to fight two foes at the same time.

The detective at once plunged into the water and made off in the direction of the contestants.

But he had gone but a short distance when the dog espied him, and, abandoning his charge, turned upon the detective.

In an instant the savage brute was upon him, and with such vigor that it was evident that he meant business.

Leveling his revolver at the dog, Thad was about to fire, when, to his surprise, Sutter ceased his struggles temporarily, looked pleadingly at the detective, and said:

"For God's sake, don't kill my dog! If either is to be killed, let it be me—but spare my dog!"

"On one condition," replied Thad, lowering his revolver.

"And that is?" panted the fellow.

"That you surrender."

"Never!"

Scarcely was the word out of his mouth when there was a sharp report, and, with a howl of pain, the dog floundered for a moment, and then sank to the bottom.

It took Sutter nearly a minute to realize what had been done, and when he did come to realize it, it appeared to drive him distracted.

He became a very madman, and his strength seemed to suddenly increase tenfold.

"Fiend!" he yelled. "You have killed my dog, the only friend I ever had, and you shall die for it!"

With that he clutched young Lemreaux by the throat, choked him to insensibility at a single grip, and hurled him away from him.

He then started for the detective, but he had taken but a few strides in that direction before he had changed his mind.

The stern, determined features, and the revolver pointed at him, were too much for his courage, and, turning away, he made a plunge into the deep water and disappeared.

CHAPTER XXIV.

FLIGHT AND PURSUIT.

Thad did not stop to see what had become of Sutter at that moment.

His impression was that the outlaw had committed suicide, but he cared very little whether he had or not.

His first object was to reach and rescue his friend.

The fact that Lemreaux had not risen from the bottom of the lake to which he had sunk, alarmed the detective considerably, and he lost no time in reaching the spot where he had gone down.

The water was over the detective's head at the point where his friend had sunk, but, locating it as best he could, he dived.

His first effort was unsuccessful, but upon going down a second time he succeeded in discovering the body and brought it to the surface.

He then swam ashore with it, and, with Tom's assistance, carried it round to the front of the house and laid it upon the porch.

Tom then procured an empty barrel from the house, the limp body was laid across the barrel, stomach downward, and then rolled backward and forward a number of times.

The unconscious man soon disgorged the water which he had swallowed, and, with the application of some stimulants, was not long in recovering sufficiently to travel.

"You are having hard luck in your detective experience, old fellow," observed Thad, sympathetically, as they walked along, Lemreaux leaning on him and Tom. "You seem to get the worst of it every time."

"So far I have," replied the young man, feebly. "But I'll get even with that scoundrel yet. I would have had the best of him as it was, if it hadn't been for that cursed dog."

"I saw how it was, and hurried to you as fast as I could travel, but I didn't make it quite quick enough. By the way, how did you come to lock horns with him? Why didn't you use your revolver, as I suggested?"

"It was something funny, the way the thing happened. You see, I went to the back of the house, as you had directed, and was waiting, revolver in hand, for the fellow to come out."

"I was standing at the corner of the house, looking toward the only exit I knew anything about, which was about the center of the building, at the back."

"All of a sudden, and before I had time to think what was up, that infernal dog slipped alongside of me from behind, jumped upon me, and before I could resist him, wrenched my revolver out of my hand."

"This all occurred in the fraction of a second, and then my attention was attracted by something splashing into the water, and when I looked in that direction I saw that it was Sutter."

"Where he had dropped from Heaven only knows, but there he was, half-waist deep already in the water, and making off toward the other shore of the stream or lake, as it is at that point."

"Determined that he should not escape if it was within my power to prevent him, unarmed as I was, I plunged in and made after him."

"Seeing that I was after him, he struck out and attempted to escape, but I was too good a swimmer for him, and soon overhauled him. As soon as he saw that he could not elude me he turned upon me with the viciousness of a wild animal, and then the struggle began."

"My first impulse was to get him back to shore, and, grasping him by the arm, swam with him quite a distance toward the shore before he succeeded in breaking my hold."

"He finally succeeded, however, and then we went at it in good earnest. As you saw, we were only a little more than waist deep at this time, and I should have had no trouble in overpowering him only for the cursed dog—I'm glad you killed him. But he kept worrying at me so that between the two of them my strength soon gave out."

They had just reached the stile by this time, and it had grown quite dark.

The sound of a furiously barking dog attracted their attention, and all three turned simultaneously.

There before them they beheld, in the faint light, the monstrous St. Bernard.

He was dripping with water, but to all appearance otherwise unhurt.

Tom appeared to be the first to recognize the dog, and grasp the situation, and he broke out in a hearty fit of laughter.

"Didn't quite fetch 'im that time," he chuckled. "Takes more'n a common shot to lay them fellers out. I reckon you must 'a' stunned him a bit, though."

Lemreaux glared at the dog savagely, and then, addressing Thad, said:

"Finish the murderous brute!"

Thad put his hand to his belt for his pistol, but two circumstances combined to cause him to hesitate.

One was that the revolver was wet, and the other was his natural repugnance to injure a dumb brute.

"No," he said, "I can't kill him now, and if I could I wouldn't."

"Then let me have your revolver," muttered Lemreaux, impatiently. "I have no scruples about killing a dog."

"My pistol is wet," explained Thad.

But in the meantime Tom had handed him his revolver, and Thad had hardly ceased speaking when there was a report, and the dog rolled over on the ground, to all appearance dead.

"I'm sorry you did that," said the detective. "I can see a man killed with less feeling than a poor animal, especially such a noble one as this fellow was."

"You might feel differently if you had had the clothes torn from your back by that same animal."

Thad took no more time, on reaching the house, than was necessary to procure a suit of dry clothing, when, with the faithful Tom as his ally, he returned to the house under the hill.

He was determined that the outlaws should have no time for rest or recuperation.

Profiting by his former experience, he went to the arbor-covered door this time, and found the entrance to the house a simple matter.

There was nobody in the kitchen when they entered it, but they had no more than done so when Bettie came in from the opposite direction.

"Oh, Tom," she cried, "what in the world have you been a-doin'?"

"Nothin', my sweet juniper," replied Tom. "Why do you ask?"

"Oh, the master has just returned, and he's a sight."

"A sight? Then we must see him by all means. Mr. Smith, let us see the circus."

"With pleasure," laughed the detective.

"Now, you must not go up there," pleaded Bettie, placing herself in the road. "The missus said that if I let anybody in she would kill me, and I know she'll do it."

"Nobody shall hurt a hair of that precious head of yours, my sunflower," chuckled Tom. "But what did ye mean by sayin' his cheroots was a sight?"

"Oh, he was all wet, and he'd been cut and scratched 'bout the face till you'd hardly know him."

"What's the old dame a-doin' with him? Puttin' him to bed with a wet towel on his cocoonut and a hot brick to his tootsy-wootsies?"

"No; she's fixin' him up so that he can travel."

"Aha! he's a-goin' to scratch gravel, is he?"

"I think so. At least I heard Hannah say that the detectives were gone, and that she thought they could smuggle him out the back way."

"Hanner said this, did she?" said Tom. "Yes."

"Bless her old giblets. You bet if she's a-controllin' the grist there's goin' ter be fun. Where's the old girl been a-keepin' her sweet self all this time?"

"Don't ask me, Tom," said the girl, with a dubious shake of the head. "If I knew half of the goings-on in this house I'd have my poor head full all the time."

"Full an' squirmen', as the gent said when he bit into the pie and found it full of ants," put in Tom. "But, come, Mr. Ferguson, we must see the circus."

He was about to pass through the door, when Bettie detained him long enough to whisper in his ear and ask:

"How many names has that farmer got, Tom? I've heard you address him by no less than four already."

"Oh, he's one of them fellers that lives in the hills," laughed Tom, "an' has lots of relations, an', havin' no name of his own, he kinder swaps round 'mong his relations as poor folks does clothes. Come on, Mr. Perkins."

They pushed on into the hall, which was now familiar to Thad, and along it to a stairway.

At this point Tom stopped and whispered:

"He's most likely in the turret. We'll go up there and head him off. Too many outlets down here for us to watch 'em all."

With that he glided up the stairway, which was in total darkness.

They had reached the first landing and started along the passage, when the sound of approaching footsteps greeted them.

"That's them," whispered Tom. "Come this way."

And he pulled at the detective's clothing as a signal.

Thad groped after him in the darkness without knowing where he was going, and finally Tom stopped with the assurance:

"We'll be all right here, unless they spring a light on us, in which case we'll have ter fight."

Thad instinctively placed his hand upon his revolver—or, rather, his two revolvers—for he had procured two fresh ones at the house, and awaited developments.

They had not long to wait, when the parties came up, poking along through the darkness.

The detective was about to spring out and attack them, when one of them said:

"Oh, it is terribly dark, Hannah. Why don't you light your candle?"

The voice was that of the weak woman, and the person addressed answered in her peculiar, gruff voice:

"Fewer lights the better just now. If I ain't mistaken, there's somebody lurking about these premises."

"Oh, dear!" cried the other woman, with a faint scream. "What makes you think so?"

"I smell them."

"Oh, dear. What an acute smell you must have!"

"'Cute enough for detectives disguised as farmers," growled old Hannah, as she prepared to descend the stairs.

"How in the world has she discovered my presence?" mused Thad to himself.

He kept perfectly quiet, however, until the two women had passed down the stairs, and then whispered to his companion:

"Now let us make for the turret without further delay. These women are doubtless going down to see whether the coast is clear or not, and the men will soon follow."

"That's it," said Tom, doubtfully, "if they ain't already went down."

"How is that possible?"

"I dun'no'; but they have queer ways of slippin' 'bout from one place to another in this house."

Nevertheless, the young man led the way and Thad followed, and they were soon climbing the ladder leading to the turret.

As they neared the top of the ladder Thad paused to listen, but there was no sound from above, and he and his companion continued their climb.

A few moments later they reached the top of the house, and Thad saw at once that the game had flown, for the turret was in darkness.

"This was a mistake, Tom," he said. "We should have waited down-stairs and taken our chances."

CHAPTER XXV.

ALMOST A CAPTURE.

Thad and Tom lost no time in getting down-stairs, and when they had reached the lower hall, the detective turned to his companion and asked:

"Which way?"

"That's a puzzler," replied the boy; "but s'pose we try the sittin' room."

"It isn't likely that they will be in there."

"Why, sir?"

"Too conspicuous."

"That's the very reason they're most

likely to be in there. Ye see they'll know that is the last place we'd think o' lookin', an' for that reason they'll be likely to go there. Just as an old maid always puts her money in the clock, thinkin' nobody'd think o' lookin' there, an' that's the first place a burglar looks for the same reason."

But when the sitting-room had been reconnoitered, Tom's theory was found to be at fault for once—nobody was there.

"You remember Bettie said something about old Hannah's plan for smuggling Sutter out the back way?" said Thad, as they left the sitting-room.

"Yes."

"Do you know the way they would be likely to go?"

"It's hard to tell. They might go by way o' the kitchen, an' then again they might go by any one o' two or three other ways."

"Which renders our prospects for catching them tolerably slim."

Thad pondered a moment and then an idea occurred to him.

"I have it," he said. "Come this way."

"Where ye goin', sir?"

"Follow me."

Thad started along the hall and Tom followed, wondering where the detective could be going.

After traversing several bewildering passages without accomplishing his object, he finally turned to Tom and said:

"I guess I am not so sure of my bearings as I thought I was."

"Where did you want to go, sir? To the kitchen?"

"No, to the little room over the cellar."

"Oh, that's round t'other way," observed Tom, turning back. "But ye don't expect to find 'em there, do ye?"

"It occurred to me that they might be there."

"I don't see what would take them there, sir."

"The treasure."

"The treasure?"

"Yes, that is where Sutter had his booty hidden."

"Oh, then, I reckon he's got it out afore this."

"I guess not."

"Why?"

"Because I got at it first. But come, let us get around there as soon as possible."

Tom asked no more questions and hurried on.

In a short time they reached the door leading into the little room. Thad tried the door and found it to be locked.

"That is a good sign, at any rate," he muttered.

"How so, sir?"

"It shows that they have not yet been here."

Tom was puzzled at this assertion, and still more puzzled when he heard the detective putting a key into the door and turning the lock.

"Where'd ye find the key, sir?" he questioned.

"I found it the other night when I was here, and in order that I might not have the trouble of hunting for it another time I put it into my pocket."

He opened the door and the two passed inside, after which Thad closed and locked the door again.

He then, for the first time since his return to the house, took out his dark-lantern and lit it.

Having done this, he shot the slide and surveyed the apartment.

The place was empty, and there was no sign of any one having been there since the night he had found and rescued Lem-reux from the dismal cell.

Having satisfied himself on this point, Thad turned off the light and observed:

"We can do no better, I think, than remain here for the present. If it is Sutter's plan to clear out, he is pretty sure to want to take his treasure with him, and we will be here to receive him when he comes for it."

"But I didn't see no treasure," interjected Tom, wonderingly.

"That is not strange, since, as I told

you before, I got here first and removed it."

He then related the account of the adventure in which he had discovered and removed the treasure from the cellar beneath the little room.

"Then ye kin just bet he's already found it out," asserted Tom, positively.

"I do not believe it."

"Why?"

"He hasn't had time since then. I've kept him on the run ever since."

At that moment Thad's quick ear caught the sound of shuffling feet outside the door, and almost simultaneously the sound of voices.

The detective put his ear close to the door and listened.

"It's gone," was the first thing that he caught.

"It ought to be there. Who could have removed it?"

"I cannot tell, but it is gone. I'll tell you."

"Well?"

"You remember that detective got in here the other day after we left and removed his pal?"

"Yes."

"He must have locked the door again and taken the key along with him."

"Then there is nothing for it but to break the door down."

"Yes, that is our only alternative."

The two voices were those of men, but Thad was unable to recognize either of them.

Neither was that of Sutter, he was sure of that.

There was some more conversation in an undertone, and then there came a voice which was strikingly familiar to the detective.

It was that of old Hannah. She demanded in a dictatorial tone:

"What's the matter?"

"The door is locked, Hannah," responded a voice, deferentially.

"Wal, what d'ye expect to do about it? Stand here parleyin' all night? Why don't ye git out an' leave the swag? I'll attend to sending it to you."

There was another discussion in an undertone, and then one said:

"I think we had better take Hannah's advice. The booty may incumber us to such an extent as cause our capture. Once we are settled in the city in a good safe place, she can send it to us or bring it in small installments, so that nothing will be suspected."

But one of the party did not appear to relish this plan.

"This is all very nice," he grumbled, "but don't you suppose that this detective will still continue to prowls about here? and don't you suppose that if he has the key, or whether he has or not, he will soon run on to the booty?"

"Not the least chance of it," sneered another. "As soon as he discovers that we have gone to the city he will be on our track, and never think of the swag."

This opinion appeared to prevail, and it seemed likely that the gang would soon withdraw without attempting to effect an entrance, so Thad concluded it was about time that he made a move, if he desired to make a capture before the fellows escaped entirely.

He put his hand on the key, which was still in the lock, and turned it noiselessly.

Then turning to Tom, he whispered:

"Be in readiness, my boy. I'm going to make a break."

"All ready, sir," whispered the boy.

Thad then quickly threw open the door.

The action was so sudden and unexpected that the gang, consisting of four men and old Hannah, was taken completely by surprise.

And before they had time to recover their presence of mind, the detective and Tom both had their revolvers leveled at them.

"Throw up your hands!" commanded Thad.

There was a slight movement, and it was evident that some of the most daring contemplated resistance, but Thad discovered this in time, and repeated his command:

"Throw up your hands! and the first man that attempts to draw a weapon I will shoot down like a dog!"

Those who were acquainted with Thad's reputation were satisfied by his tone that he meant what he said.

After a little more reluctance up went the four pairs of hands, one after another.

"Your'n too, Hanner," put in Tom.

The woman bestowed a contemptuous scowl upon the boy, and then snarled:

"Not to save yer life, Tom Gillam!"

And before anybody had any idea of her intention, she slipped away into the gloom of the passage and disappeared.

Thad had too much on his hands to warrant bothering with the woman, and he gave the command to march.

The four men, none of whom he had already discovered was Sutter, wheeled and strode along the hall toward the front of the house.

One of the men carried a light, and before they had proceeded very far it occurred to the detective that it would be better to take charge of that himself, and asked the man to turn it over to him.

But instead of obeying, the fellow doggedly threw the light upon the floor, extinguishing it and leaving the passage in darkness.

This was done with the evident intention of giving the men an opportunity for a break, but Thad was equal to the occasion.

The light had scarcely struck the floor when he had flashed his dark lantern, illuminating the surroundings with a more brilliant light than the other lantern had done.

The men, who had been on the point of revolting, were completely cowed by this action, and moved along without further resistance.

The head of the procession finally reached the front door and the detective stepped ahead to open it, when he found that it was locked.

There was no time now to attempt to break it down or force the lock.

Something more expeditious must be resorted to.

And then he thought of the window in the sitting-room from which he had made his escape on a previous occasion.

Stepping back and opening the sitting-room door, he ordered:

"This way, men. Pass out this way."

The men turned with a dogged step and sullenly filed through the door into the sitting-room.

Still keeping them covered with his revolver, as did also Tom, he removed the lower sash of one of the windows, and then ordered the men to file out.

But before the first one had obeyed, he backed out himself and stood outside on the porch with revolver in hand, waiting for them to come on.

But they did not move as promptly as he could have wished.

No longer having him in their rear, they appeared to have lost something of their terror and hesitated.

But they soon found that there was a driver at their back who was not to be trifled with.

"Git a move on yer!" commanded Tom Gillam, giving the rearmost man a dig in the ribs with the muzzle of his pistol. "Step lively, gents, or this here gun's liable to go off, an' if it does, somebody's skin'll need patchin'. Push along, there. Whiskers. Here, Sandy, don't go ter sleep!"

And thus he soon got them on the move, and in a little while they had all filed out of the room.

"Now, gentlemen," said Thad, as soon as the last one was out, "I'll trouble you to hold out your hands while I adorn them with my badge of beauty."

And while Tom kept the gang under guard, Thad handcuffed them, one by one.

CHAPTER XXVI. OFF THE SCENT.

It was long after midnight when Thad reached Watson's house with his batch of prisoners, and pending the hitching up of

the team preparatory to driving them over to Flushing, where he would take the train for Long Island City, he took them into the doctor's sitting-room for the purpose of questioning them.

As soon as the men came into the light he discovered that each and every one was disguised in some clumsy fashion, and this he proceeded to remove.

When they had been restored to their normal conditions, Watson recognized them all as his neighbors, none of whom he would have suspected of wrong-doing.

They were a shame-faced lot, and Thad thought he would have no trouble in eliciting the information he desired from them.

Selecting one of the men, whose name Watson had informed him was Brundidge, a steady-looking farmer of over sixty, he began

"Now, Mr. Brundidge, as you must recognize, you are in a tight place. You have been caught red-handed, as it were, and there is no possible chance of escaping conviction. You have one chance, however."

"Whut is thet?" asked the farmer, eagerly.

"Turn State's evidence."

"Cain't do thet," he murmured.

"Why not?"

"I've took an oath not to betray the band, an' I won't do it. I'll die fu'st."

"But think of your family. By revealing the whereabouts of your leader you will escape punishment; otherwise you will be tried for conspiracy and complicity in a murder and two robberies, and you will either swing or go to penitentiary for life. Have you no regard for your family, sir?"

"It's too late now. I sh'u'd 'a' thought o' thet long ago, I reckon, but now it's too late. I got to take my chances with the rest on the boys."

And this was his ultimatum. No amount of persuasion or threatening sufficed to worm the slightest secret from him.

So it proved with the other three, who were also farmers.

Each in turn was questioned, pleaded with and threatened, but all to no purpose.

And finally the detective gave it up, and then the wagon was announced, the gang loaded up and driven to the village, where they were transferred to the first train for Long Island City.

When he had seen his prisoners locked up Thad drove back with his friend Watson and Tom, and as they started off the doctor congratulated him with:

"Well, old fellow, you've made a pretty good job of it so far. Got six of them behind the bars, anyway."

"Yes," returned Thad, ruefully, "but I feel that my biggest job is still before me."

"I have no doubt that there will still be some difficulty in capturing Sutter, but you will succeed."

"Oh, I do not doubt but that I shall succeed—in time; but the worst of it is, after all my work, I am at the beginning so far as he is concerned."

"How is that?"

"He is gone, and I have not the slightest clew as to which way he went."

"Still, you may run upon a clew when you least expect it, by watching his house."

"That is my only hope."

It was daylight once more when they got back to Watson's house, and Thad and Tom Gillam were completely worn out with their terrible ordeal.

So they decided to go to bed and be ready to renew their work the coming evening.

After a hearty breakfast they retired, and the detective did not awake till late in the afternoon.

He had just made his toilet and got dressed when there came a rap at his door.

On opening it he found Tom Gillam.

"Well, my boy, how do you feel after your night's adventure?" he questioned, grasping the young man's hand.

"Tip top, sir, as the robin said when

it lit atop o' the lightnin' rod. But I've got news fer ye, sir."

"What is it?"

"Read that, sir."

And Tom handed him a scrap of paper, which had the appearance of having been crumpled into a tight wad.

On being smoothed out it was found to be written or scrawled over with a pencil and was almost illegible.

"What is it?" questioned the detective, before beginning the attempt at deciphering.

"I dun'no', sir," answered Tom. "I can't read, but Bettie, who give it to me, said it was something that would please you."

Thad then set to work earnestly trying to decipher the scrawl, but for a long time it resisted his subtlest efforts.

After a long and patient struggle, however, he made out to read the composition, which was about as follows:

"No time to look after—. See that it is removed from present place of concealment before — finds it. I shall soon be settled, and send address, when you can fetch it to me, little by little, or all at once, as you think best. I should advise former, as not so liable to excite suspicion. Keep everybody in the dark as to my departure. Let them think, if possible, that I am still with you, and confined to my room."

That was all. It conveyed no intelligence as to the whereabouts or intended rendezvous of the fugitive, and so far as the rest of the information was concerned, it was no more than Thad had already learned through the conversation he had overheard outside the little room door.

But Tom appeared to think that he had made an important discovery, and watched the detective's face with a hopeful expression. As soon as the latter looked up from the perusal the boy asked:

"Ain't that good, sir?"

But at the sight of the detective's countenance the boy's hope faded.

"There is nothing in it," rejoined Thad, "more than I knew already. Did Bettie seem to think it would be of any assistance to me in finding this rascal?"

"Yes, sir; she thought it would lead you to find him right off. Mebby if you seen her she might be able to tell you something."

"Possibly. There will be no harm in seeing her, anyway."

Accordingly, a little after dark he made another trip to the house under the hill, accompanied by Tom Gillam.

At Tom's suggestion, they entered the premises by way of the secret passage at the sumach bushes, and as the young man probably expected, Bettie was there waiting for them—or at least for him.

However, she seemed quite as delighted to see the detective as she was to see her lover, and she expressed it with:

"Oh, I'm so glad you've come, sir. The missus wants to see you, and I think she has something to tell you. You see, sir, the missus is very sick—she was took sudden this morning after you left the house with the prisoners, and I do believe the master's give her something."

"He has been back, then?" interrupted Thad.

"Been back?" said the girl, wonderingly.

"Yes, he was gone when we were here."

"Oh, bless you, no, sir. Master was in the house all the while. But he kept hid in what they call the 'Buried Chamber' till you was gone. And then he came down to where the missus was and there was a dreadful quarrel, and he accused her of being the cause of the arrest of his friends. Then after that they made it up, and pretty soon he went away. He hadn't been gone but a little while when she took sick and had to go to bed, and there she's been ever since, and I don't believe she'll last long."

"You are sure that he has gone?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"How do you know this?"

"I heard him tell Hannah that he would be in New York in the future, and

gave her a slip of paper with his address on it."

"What is this paper which you gave Tom to give me?"

"Oh, I don't know, sir, what that is. I couldn't make nothing out of it, only there seemed to be something puzzling about it, and I thought mebbe you could make it out."

"Where did you get it?"

"I found it wadded up on the floor in master's room after he went out."

"Well, I guess I had better see the mistress," interposed Thad. "Will you lead the way, Miss Bettie?"

"Yes, sir."

To Thad's surprise, instead of taking him in through the front way, or even the kitchen entrance, the girl went round to the rear of the building to the long addition, previously alluded to, and where it was necessary to wade in a foot of water to reach it.

"Why do you come this way?" asked the detective, as soon as they were in the long, narrow corridor.

"It is the only way to the missus' own room, sir."

"Do you mean to say that she was compelled to wade through this water as we have done whenever she wanted to go to or from her room?"

"Yes, sir—if she wanted to leave it, but she never did, unless master gave her leave. There is another way to get in, but only the master knew how to open the door, and when that was closed, nobody knew how to open it, or even where the door was."

"And she is locked in there now, is she?"

"Yes, sir. As soon as you was gone, he put her in her own room and fastened her in."

"You have seen her since?"

"Oh, yes, sir. I just left her a few minutes before you came."

"And you had to go in this way, eh?"

"Yes, sir. You see, when the master puts the missus in her room and goes away he don't want nobody, even the servants, to go near her."

"How did you come to discover this route to her room?"

"Just by accident. I was out in the back yard there for something—we very seldom go out there, you know—when I happened to look up at a window and saw the missus looking out. I was awfully surprised, for I hadn't seen the missus for two or three days, and s'posed she was away. Then I went up close to her window, which was barred over like a prison, and we talked some, and I asked her if there was any way to come in to her, and she pointed to the long corridor—this way."

"Does Hannah know of this route?"

"Oh, yes, but she never comes this way. She can go the other way, if she wants to."

"Then she possessed the secret?"

"Oh, yes, sir. She had all the master's secrets. He never did anything without consulting her."

"Is Hannah in the house at present?"

"Yes, sir."

"Would you know how to find her?"

"Yes, sir; but I wouldn't dare."

"Still, there would be no danger to you in telling me how to find her."

"Oh, yes, there would, sir. She'd know I told you how to go, and she'd kill me."

"But I will see that she shall not harm you."

The girl looked up with a childish, half-doubting expression, and, after a pause, said:

"You won't be here all the time, sir?"

"No, but the chances are that I shall take Hannah away, and then I am quite sure she won't molest you."

"Take Hannah away, sir?"

And there was a half-stifled expression of delight and vague hope in the girl's face.

"Yes, from appearances, she is as guilty as the rest of them, and if my suspicions are confirmed, she will have to go along with the rest of them."

"Not unless ye're smarter than I think ye air."

The voice had emanated from the little

window through which Thad had plunged on that eventful occasion, and, looking up, he beheld old Hannah's ugly face.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A HORRIBLE REVELATION.

The fading light had only afforded a vague view of old Hannah's face at the window, and it vanished the moment she had uttered the words of defiance.

Where could she have gone?

The detective's experience, upon jumping through the window, it will be remembered, was to receive a cold bath in the water-filled cellar.

Then the truth flashed upon him.

The woman had been in the cellar searching for the treasure which Sutter had committed to her care, and while there she had heard the voices of Thad and Bettie in the passage, and climbed up to the window to listen.

Upon hearing judgment passed upon herself she was unable to hold her tongue any longer, and gave vent to her spleen in the foregoing speech.

In an instant his plan of operation was complete, and, turning to Tom, he said:

"Tom, keep a watch on that window and see that that woman does not escape, and I will go around to the door and head her off."

"I'll do it, sir," said the boy, firmly.

"Bettie, you lead the way, as I am not quite sure of my bearings among these corridors."

Bettie led the way, and the detective soon arrived at the door of the little room over the cellar.

The door was slightly ajar, and a glance was sufficient to show him that the lock had been broken.

He opened the door and looked in, but all was silent, and, so far as he could make out in the dim light, the room deserted.

Still not satisfied, he lighted his dark lantern and flashed it about the apartment.

There was no one there, but as the cellar-door was up, he flashed the light down upon the steps, and, discovering nobody there, walked down the slimy steps and threw his light about the watery cellar.

But all to no purpose. Hannah had evidently made her escape as soon as she had uttered the words above recorded.

"We shall waste no more time looking for her now," observed Thad, on regaining the passage. "Let us go to the room of your mistress."

A moment later, when the detective entered the dismal room occupied by Mrs. Sutter, he was deeply impressed, not to say horrified, at the sight that met him there.

The room was dimly lighted by a wretched, smoky lamp which sat upon a cheap, bare table, but it was sufficient to show the desolation of the surroundings.

The floor, which was innocent of carpet, was wet from the waters underneath the house, and mildewed and rotten in places.

A broken chair or two and a miserable-looking bed comprised the furniture.

Upon the wretched bed lay the woman, paler and more haggard than usual, and to all appearances either asleep or unconscious.

But as he approached the bedside, the woman opened her eyes, stared at him with a puzzled expression for a few seconds, and then smiling feebly, said, in a weak little voice:

"Oh, it is you. I am glad you have come, sir."

Thad seated himself on a broken chair near the bed and asked:

"You are ill. What appears to be the matter, madam?"

"Oh, nothing more than usual," she murmured, wearily.

"But I have been informed that you were taken worse soon after your husband's departure."

"That is true. But—but—it might have been the fatigue, or—"

"See here, madam," interrupted Thad. "you may as well be frank with me. You know who I am, and you know what my mission has been here all along. You also know that I am acquainted with

your husband's character. So it is too late to dissemble any longer. Tell me frankly whether your illness is not attributable to some potion administered by him."

"Oh, no, no! He would not—"

"Pardon me, madam, but you must tell me the truth now. You have shielded him long enough. I understand that. But unless you tell me the truth at once, it may soon be too late. In any event, he will have no chance to terrorize you again."

She looked up in alarm.

"Then—then—he is—"

Her poor voice failed her to pronounce the terrible words, and the detective, believing it for the best all around, concluded to romance just the least bit. He answered, solemnly:

"Yes, madam, he is where all criminals must come sooner or later."

But with a mental reservation he modified the statement for the benefit of his conscience by telling himself that he hoped the fellow soon would be.

The woman lay like one in a trance for some minutes, her dull black eyes staring up at the detective's face.

Then gradually a faint, pleasing smile came and played about the purple lips and twinkled ever so feebly in the lusterless eyes.

It seemed as if the ecstasy born of the thought of freedom from this man's brutal slavery was struggling with the love she had once borne him, and probably still bore him to some extent, in spite of his inhumanity toward her.

"Then—then—" she murmured, her weak voice slightly thrilled with the joy she could not repress, "he won't come back to—to—"

"No, he will never come back to ill-treat you," interrupted the detective. "You are safe from his brutality from this forward."

"And—and—I may speak my mind, and—and—tell the truth?"

"Without reserve or hindrance."

At this point a deadly pallor stole over her features, and Thad, guessing the cause, hastened to take from his pocket a small vial which contained a powerful antidote for all poisons and a stimulant at the same time.

Pouring a few grains of the compound upon a bit of paper, he administered it between the half-open, resistless lips.

She swallowed the medicine, and bestowed a grateful smile upon her deliverer, apparently understanding what it was.

In a little while she had revived sufficiently to be able to talk; and Thad opened the conversation by asking:

"He has not always treated you like this, has he?"

"Oh, no," she replied, promptly. "When we were married, ten years ago, and for a long time afterward, no husband could have been kinder or more affectionate. He was a poor young man, but well educated and very attractive, and I was an heiress with considerable money. We settled in New York, and he went into business."

"For a while everything went well, apparently. He seemed to be getting along very well, I thought. Of course I knew nothing about his business affairs. And then one day he came in, looking dreadfully downcast, and told me that he was ruined, that every cent of my money was gone, and that he was a hopeless pauper."

"I tried to console him, and assured him, as a foolish woman is apt to do, that he would soon recover his losses, and then he broke down and acknowledged that the money had been lost in gambling."

"This nearly broke my heart, and I could never feel the same toward him afterward, but somehow things went on, and pretty soon I noticed that he appeared to have plenty of money. This rejoiced me, for I had no idea how he came by it, and never knew until we came out here."

"Then one day after there had been a robbery in the neighborhood I accidentally saw him taking a bag which ap-

peared to be very heavy into the little room over the cellar.

"As soon as he came out I accosted him about it, for my heart had told me that there was something wrong. He grew greatly confused, made several attempts to make up a story, and finally told me in a most brutal manner that it was none of my business, and that if I had not sense enough to keep my mouth closed, he would find a way of closing it for me.

"Of course I was shocked and horrified, but I possessed enough spirit and courage to tell him what I thought of his conduct, and concluded by asserting that I would die before I would live with a thief.

"This was as good as my death warrant. He at once set carpenters to work building this addition over the swamp, and when it was completed put me in it, and for over three months I never caught sight of a human face, except that of old Hannah, who appeared to have gained complete control over him.

"At length, however, there was a partial deliverance for me. That dear little maid, Bettie, happened to be in the back yard one day, and, espying me at my prison window, begged me to let her come to me. I finally granted her request, and from that on we were inseparable companions, whenever she could steal an opportunity of coming to me."

"But you have occasionally escaped from your room," interposed the detective. "I saw you once or twice, if I am not mistaken, in other parts of the house."

"Oh, yes; but that is only very recently, and either during his absence or when he was about to leave and required my assistance to prepare him for departure."

"Was it not possible to prevail upon Hannah to let you out?"

"No, Hannah was only too glad to have me confined, as she feared I might disclose some of their wicked plots, or regain the confidence of my husband."

"She wielded considerable power over him, then?"

"She controlled him completely. He dared not undertake any enterprise, as they called their robbery plots, without first consulting her. She was everything."

"And yet she was a mere servant in the house, was she not?"

"Yes, and a low scullery maid at that."

"How did she succeed in gaining this ascendancy over him?"

"Partly through her cunning, and partly through discovering some of his secrets, which she threatened to divulge. From that time forth they worked as partners in all their nefarious schemes, only she was the actual boss."

"Did he ever confide any of his plans to you?"

"Never, except after the crimes were committed. And then he would often come to me, and, by way of taunting me and adding to my humiliation, relate how he had committed some robbery, and in some cases murder, and ask me how it felt to be the wife of a robber after having been the belle of the Fifth Avenue set."

"Did you hear any of these things through any other channel?"

"Sometimes Bettie would tell me something she had overheard which had passed between Sutter and his men."

"Did Hannah ever allude to these transactions?"

"Never."

"You must have heard something of a young man being thrown from his buggy and killed on the road near here, did you not?"

The woman raised her eyes to a small shelf just above the head of her bed. Then, raising one thin, bloodless hand, she pointed in the direction, with the ward.

"There is a little vial up there. Get it, please."

Thad arose and took down the vial, which he found to contain a grayish powder.

"Do you know anything about drugs?" she asked.

"Something," he answered.

"What would you call that?"

"I should say that it was chloral hydrate."

"What is known among thieves in New York as 'knock-out,' is it not?"

"Yes."

And then Thad recalled that the post-mortem examination of the body of young Howarth revealed the presence of this poison in his stomach.

"My husband brought that in here the same evening of the accident, and, holding it up before me, said, 'If the fools who are trying to find how that young man managed to kill himself without leaving any marks could only get a peep at that bottle, it might clear some of the cobwebs out of their brains.'"

"How did he manage to administer the poison? Was the young man at the house?"

"No, it seems that he stopped to inquire the way to somewhere, and at the same time complained of having a chill. So my husband insisted upon taking him a glass of wine."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A CLEW AT LAST.

Although this had been virtually Burr's theory from the outset, the confirmation of it by this dying woman and her matter-of-fact manner of giving it, impressed him strangely.

There was a gruesomeness about the whole affair that set his nerves tingling, in spite of his vast experience with gruesome subjects.

After examining the bottle a little further he said:

"I shall take this along with me. I wish to confirm the theory established by the post-mortem held on the murdered man."

"Yes, take it along," she answered, with a sigh of relief. "It would have been better for me, probably, if you had got hold of it before."

"You don't mean to say that—"

"Yes, sir," she interrupted, "that is what he gave me just before he left."

"But how was it possible that he could have given it to you unless you chose to take it?"

"Easier than you think. He pretended to be very solicitous of my health all at once, and insisted upon giving me a little wine. Fool that I was, I might have known his motive, but flattered and soothed at a single kind word from him, I was silly enough to imagine that his solicitude was genuine until after I had swallowed the wine. And then he took down the vial, held it up before me, laughed, and said that he guessed my troubles would soon be at an end, the same as the chap who was thrown out of the buggy."

"And yet you recovered without medical aid?"

"Yes, he evidently did not give me enough. My constitution is stronger than he calculated on, I presume. It threw me into a deep torpor, though."

"Has he ever attempted anything of the kind before?"

"Twice before."

"And failed."

"Yes; for some reason he was not to succeed in killing me."

"It is strange that you continued to live with him under such circumstances."

"Where could I go?"

"Have you no folks?"

"I have; but they would have nothing to do with me now. If I had left him as soon as I learned what he was, they would have taken me back; but I turned a deaf ear to their advice then, believing that I would be able to reclaim him, and now it is too late to ask them."

"If you will furnish me their address I shall be glad to do what I can to bring about a reconciliation."

"No, not for the world," she declared, stoutly. "I have but a little while to live, and it is better that I should die away from them than to go back now and harrow their feelings with my troubles and death."

Thad was too deeply moved to speak for some moments, and when he did it was to vary the subject somewhat.

"And yet, in spite of all his ill-treatment, you have tried to shield this man."

"Yes. Why shouldn't I? He was my husband."

"That was your idea when you insisted upon blindfolding me before you would consent to conduct me from the house, was it not?"

"Certainly. I learned from Hannah what your business was, and I was determined to thwart your motives at all hazards."

"You appeared to enjoy somewhat more liberty then than either before or afterward."

"Yes; when he saw that I was working in harmony with Hannah to prevent his apprehension he allowed me a good deal of liberty—more than I had enjoyed for years."

"You would have died, almost, to have saved him, I have no doubt."

"Yes, I would, willingly."

"And this is your reward."

Thad had modulated his voice in harmony with that of the invalid, and the conversation had gradually softened into little more than a whisper, so that the slightest noise could have been heard above it. At this point two things occurred almost simultaneously to put at least a temporary end to the colloquy.

Tom, who had seated himself on one of the other broken chairs, had striven manfully for a long time to keep awake in spite of the somnolent influence of the droning voices, but at last nature had yielded to superior numbers, and the lad had begun to snore.

Almost simultaneously with the snore came a strange gurgle from the direction of the door, which might have been suppressed laughter or anything else. But when Thad looked round, and his eyes wandered in the direction of the door, he had no doubt about the sound having been suppressed laughter, for the face of old Hannah, which peered in at the door, was wrinkled and corrugated into what she would doubtless have called a smile, although it had more the appearance of a rhinoceros in the preliminary throes of a sneeze.

The sight of the vicious woman and the realization that she had overheard the conversation, enraged the detective almost beyond endurance. While with the poor, weak woman, it had the effect of throwing her into a swoon.

Thad jumped to his feet, and, in a single bound, reached the door.

The action was unexpected on Hannah's part, and, although she attempted to run, she was not quick enough for Thad, who caught her before she had got a dozen steps from the door.

She struggled a little at first, but the probable recollection of a former encounter with him caused her to see the futility of resistance, and she calmed down and became quiet.

She glared at the detective with her accustomed savageness, however, and demanded:

"Wal, what d'ye want with me?"

"Oh, not much. I have a little cage over at Long Island City for you, that is all."

And before she knew what he was about to do he had the handcuffs snapped on her wrists.

She looked down at her wrists with a contemptuous sneer, and muttered:

"Them's purty things for a lady's wrists! I thought I'd be wearin' real diamonds by this time, but, 'stead o' that, it's these things. Oh, well, sich is life. Got Sammy hard an' fast, I reckon."

It was necessary for Thad to think a moment before he was able to determine who was meant by Sammy, and then he remembered that Sutter's Christian name was Samuel. So he replied:

"No; I'm sorry to say that I have not."

"Haven't you got him yet?" she screeched.

"Not yet. But I shall soon corral him now."

"You never will! An' ef I'd know'd that ye didn't have him, ye'd 'a' never got ye'r nippers on old Hannah. Great Heavens! To think I was sich a fool! I thought sure ye had him, an' that the game was up, or ye kin bet I'd 'a' never

threwed up as long as there was a drop o' blood in my veins!"

"Oh, well, as you say, my good woman, such is life. You are no worse off than the rest of your gang—Sammy excepted—and you know that you must come to it some time."

"I'd 'a' never come to it if I'd 'a' knowed Sammy's flippers was still loose," she raved. "Nuther you nor all ye'r crew could 'a' took me!"

"You think as long as he is at liberty there is hope of evading justice, eh?"

"S'long's he's loose there's no chance o' sich as you takin' me."

"And yet, with him still at liberty, I have caged six of his men," interjected Thad, smiling.

"Oh, them?" she sneered; "them was only turkles. A kitten could 'a' cornered them farmers."

"Well, there is one chance for you, Hannah."

"Whut's that?" she growled.

"You can have the pleasure of seeing Sammy under lock and key with a very little energy on your part."

"Whut d'ye mean?"

"Give me his address."

"I ain't got it; an' if I had, I'd die before I'd give it to ye!"

At that moment Thad felt some one touch him on the arm, and, turning his head, found Tom standing there with a very serious countenance.

The boy did not speak, but jerked his head significantly in the direction of the room which the detective had just left.

Understanding that he was wanted in there, he said:

"Stand guard here a moment, Tom."

Tom drew his revolver and took up his position in front of the vixen, and Thad hastened into the room.

Here a sad sight met his gaze.

The sick woman's head was thrown back on the pillow, her eyes were closed, and she had apparently ceased to breathe.

Kneeling by the bedside, with her face buried in the bedclothes, was poor little Bettie. Her stifled sobs were all that broke the deathly stillness of the chamber.

Thad hastened to the bedside and lifted the wasted hand of the poor woman and examined the pulse.

The next instant he dropped it with the half-whispered exclamation: "Dead!"

Hurrying back into the passage and relieving Tom, he despatched the boy for Dr. Watson.

Meanwhile he marched his prisoner into the room and invited her to a seat.

Hannah seated herself in a sullen fashion, and stared curiously toward the bed for some moments. At length she asked in a gentler tone than was common with her:

"Whut's up over there? Lizzie wheezed out?"

"She has passed away," replied Thad, solemnly.

"Oh, well," said the vixen, carelessly, "the poor wretch's got the best of it. Better to croak 'tween sheets than be choked with a rope or be tickled to death in a 'lectric chair."

The woman's cold-bloodedness sent a chill through the detective, and he did not deign to answer her remark.

Going to Bettie's side, he lifted her from the damp floor and sat her on a chair, and then proceeded to console her as best he could.

"Don't cry, my girl," he said. "The poor woman is better off."

"I know," sobbed Bettie. "But she was the only friend I had here, and I was the only friend she had; and now that she is gone, I will have nobody to sympathize with."

Presently Watson arrived, but of course he could do nothing for the poor woman, who was long past human aid.

He had brought some of his servants with him, however, and a wagon, in which to convey the remains to his own house.

This was done, and poor Bettie was also provided with quarters at the kindly doctor's home.

Thad and Tom Gillam then got old Hannah in the wagon, and the mysterious house under the hill was for once tenantless.

The following day, after his return from the county seat, where he had had his charge incarcerated, Thad took Bettie to one side to question her with regard to a certain matter which he had hitherto overlooked.

"Bettie," he began, "can you write?"

The girl looked up in surprise, and answered:

"Why, yes, sir. Why do you ask?"

"Let me see you write something," he went on, handing her a pencil and a card.

The girl was greatly mystified, but finally took the pencil and wrote a few lines on the card.

Thad took the card, examined the writing carefully, then took out a note and compared the writing of the two, and finally nodded approvingly, with the remark:

"I guess you can tell me who Rosebud is, Bettie."

CHAPTER XXIX.

ON A HOT SCENT.

Bettie blushed and hung her head at the question, but did not speak until the detective had repeated his question in another form:

"Tell me, Bettie, who is Rosebud?"

"Where did you see that name, sir?"

"Never mind. Did you not write a note once and sign it Rosebud?"

"Ye—yes, sir," she faltered, "but—"

"Tell me all about it," he interrupted. "I am satisfied that you were forced by some one to write the note, but who was it?"

"Hannah, sir."

"I thought so. Did you know anything about what the note meant when you wrote it?"

"No, sir. Hannah, who couldn't write, used to get me to do a good deal of writing for her, and there was a good deal of it that was all a puzzle to me."

"I suppose you were sometimes obliged to read the letters which she received, then?"

"Yes, sir, nearly all of them. I nearly always go to the post office for the mail, and if there is anything for Hannah, she takes me into her room and has me read her letters for her."

"Were the letters she received as mysterious as the ones you wrote for her?"

"Most always. I could never tell what they were about, and often wondered what Hannah saw in them to laugh at when they seemed nonsensical to me."

"So you always went to the post office for the mail?"

"Not always. Sometimes some of the neighbors would bring it out."

Here she appeared to be seized with a sudden inspiration, for she stopped, colored a little, and at length put her hand into her pocket and took out a letter.

"Come to think of it," she said, "here's a letter for Hannah now. Mr. Rhodes brought it out a little while ago, and, happening to see me in the front yard here, called me and handed it to me. I wonder what I had better do with it."

"I'll take care of that," said Thad, snatching the envelope eagerly. It bore the New York postmark.

Excusing himself from Bettie, he hurried up to his room, and lost no time in tearing the letter open.

And this is what it said:

"Dear Rosebud—Just this minute arrived in the city, and hasten to write you. All seems to be up with us. The detectives are hot on my track, and it would be folly for me to remain any longer at the house in the swamp. I am in a safe place at present, but we cannot be too cautious, for that sleuth has a scent like a bloodhound. Everything depends upon you now. Get the swag out of the cellar before those sneaks discover it; conceal it somewhere, and convey it to me by litters, as opportunity offers. It will not do for me to write my address, but you can meet me, say, to-night, at exactly ten, on the elevated railway platform of the Grand Central Depot. That will be convenient for you, and there are so many different kinds of people coming and going there that we are not so apt to attract attention. If Bettie reads this, swear her on her life to secrecy."

SAMMY."

Thad was delighted.

He had seldom in his life experienced such exhilaration over the discovery of a clew as he did in this case.

Amid it all, however, he could not repress a smile at the idea of this bandit and apparently practical man adopting the name of Rosebud for such an uncouth confederate as old Hannah.

So much amused was he over the affair, that he was prone to show the letter to his friend Watson, and also to Tom Gillam.

Tom laughed heartily over it in his own clownish fashion, and observed:

"The idee o' callin' old Hannah a rosebud! W'y, it's be more like if he called her horse-reddish."

After explaining the situation to his friend, he said to Tom:

"Tom, I'm going to town this afternoon, and I want you to accompany me. I think our game is within our reach, and as you have been a faithful ally all the way through, I want you to share the credit at the finish."

"I'm with ye, sir," smiled Tom, delighted at the prospect.

That afternoon Watson drove the pair to Flushing, where they took the train for New York.

Thad went directly home, where, some time after supper, he prepared himself and Tom for the adventure which was to occupy them that evening.

During the detective's acquaintance with old Hannah, brief as it had been, he had made a pretty careful study of her manner, walk, way of speaking, and general peculiarities.

So he made himself up to represent this remarkable woman as nearly as his peculiar talents and long experience in this line would permit. And so well did he succeed that when he turned from the mirror for Tom's approval, that young gentleman roared with laughter, and swore that if old Hannah's mother could see him she would mistake him for her daughter.

"W'y, ye couldn't be no more alike," he declared, "if ye was twins. His turnip-greens'll be took in sure."

"You think we shall be able to fool him, do you, Tom?"

"There's no doubt o' that, sir. But what for a make-up air ye a-goin' ter give me?"

"Let me see. How would it do to have you take off Bettie?"

"I'm afeared I couldn't do it, sir."

"Why?"

"W'y, ye see, sir, in the first place, I'm twiced as thick round the girt as Bettie, an' the next place, my mug'd give me away."

"Oh, as to your face, there would be no trouble about that, as you would wear a veil. But I guess, after all, you had better go pretty much as you are, except for a pair of whiskers which I shall attach to your face."

So saying, he took a false beard from his wardrobe and adjusted it to the young man's chin.

With his coarse, heavy features tanned to a dark, ruddy brown, he had the appearance of a very uncouth old farmer.

"You had better not let the police see you, Tom," laughed the detective.

"Why, sir?"

"They'll take you for a come-back, sure."

As the time approached nine o'clock the two set forth, so as to have plenty of time, as the appointment was for ten.

To avoid any possible encounter with the police, Thad procured a close carriage near his house.

He entertained no fear as far as he himself was concerned, but he was not so confident with regard to the boy.

Provided with a small hand-satchel, nobody, even the acutest policeman on the force, would have suspected Thad of being anything but what he seemed—a stout old lady, rather muscular, but evidently fastidious about having any one see her face, as he wore a very thick, black veil.

When they reached the Forty-second Street depot it wanted nearly half an hour of the time, and Thad took his strange-looking companion into a waiting-room, where they selected the darkest and least occupied corner to be found.

Nevertheless, many were the curious stares bestowed upon them, and not a few sneers and giggles from city youths who happened to pass that way, until poor Tom was ready to faint with mortification at having himself addressed as "Whiskers."

At length the hour drew near, and Thad whispered to his companion that he thought it about time for them to go upon the platform.

"You had better keep in the back-ground," he advised. "I will do the business, and you keep back far enough, and with your back turned, so that there will be no possibility of his recognizing you."

"'Cause he's sure to know me," said Tom, who had ceased to realize how he appeared.

"I'm not so sure of that, but it is just as well not to give him a chance until I have him secure."

They passed up the iron stairway to the gate, where Thad purchased two tickets, and they went out upon the platform where the trains of the branch road that runs from the Third Avenue line lands and takes on its passengers.

Here the crowd was tolerably dense, and the people were in too much of a hurry to get on or off the trains for them to pay much attention to the two make-believes.

A burly policeman who patrolled the platform eyed them pretty closely, so closely, indeed, that Tom became pretty nervous, and at length came up and asked Thad what he was waiting for.

"I'm expecting some friends," was his explanation.

"Which way?" asked the cop.

"From below. We're goin' up-town together."

That seemed to satisfy the policeman, who, after giving Thad another stare in the vain attempt to penetrate his thick veil, swaggered off.

"I'm jest sure that we'll be arrested afore we're done with it, sir," whispered Tom.

"Not the least danger of it, my boy. If one of these officers should take it into his head to make trouble, all I would have to do would be to show my badge."

That reassured the boy somewhat, but he could not get over the constant stares bestowed upon him by the passers-by and the occasional allusions to his face adornment.

"I'm afraid it would take some time to train you into a first-class city detective, Tom," laughed Thad, at last. "You are all right in the country, but the city makes you lose your head."

"That's 'cause there's so many folks here, an—"

But at that moment Thad gave him a sharp nudge, and the boy, without knowing exactly why, dodged back several yards to the rear of the detective, and stood in the shadow of a post.

The occasion of the action on the detective's part was the appearance of a man who had just come through the gate.

The new-comer paused on passing the gate, and cast his eyes about at the people collected on the platform as if looking for some one.

The general appearance of the man was by no means what Thad was looking for. He bore no resemblance to Sutter, either in dress or facial expression, but there was something in his walk and manner that led the detective to believe, vaguely, that this was his man in disguise.

He was in a quandary for a moment as to what course to pursue, but he soon made up his mind, and as the new-comer walked on past the gate, he sidled up to him, and said, in a low tone:

"I say, Sammy, was ye lookin' fer Rosebud?"

The man glared at him in astonishment, and, with evident indignation, muttered something about some people being "deuced fresh," and, passing on without a word, was soon in the waiting train.

It was rarely that Thad had been so completely deceived, and naturally he felt a sense of professional mortification.

The train pulled out, another came in, unloaded its human freight, and then came a rush from the street again.

Thad strained his eyes, surveying the faces of all the passengers as they filed past him, but in vain, and then, when the crowd had thinned down to a few scattering ones, there came a solitary gentleman, dressed in the height of fashion, strolling as leisurely as if he had the whole night before him, dropped his fare in the box with a careless air, and sauntered on, scarcely lifting his eyes to any one who came or went.

Thad recognized his man—Sam Sutter, without the least attempt at disguise.

The villain had never appeared more cool or self-possessed, and when the detective walked up to him and silently put out his hand, Sutter grasped it cordially, and said:

"Why, Hannah, how prompt you are! I expected to have to wait for you some time. You are not always so prompt, my girl. Ah," he went on, glancing down at the bag in Thad's hand, "you brought the business, I observe. Good girl. Let us go somewhere where we can examine it."

And, turning about, they left the station.

CHAPTER XXX.

A SLICK TURN-DOWN.

All this time the detective had not uttered a word.

Indeed, Sutter, who was in a high state of glee over his success, did not permit him, keeping up such a chatter himself.

He had taken the satchel from the supposed woman, at the outset, and Thad followed him through the great station and down the iron stairway, wondering all the time what was to become of poor Tom.

When they reached the street, Sutter called a cab, and they entered it and drove off.

"You see," began the swamp fox, "I have got a place away out here in an out-of-the-way locality where neither the police nor anybody else would think of looking for me. I shall stay here until things quiet down a bit, and then silently slide off to Europe one of these fine days, where I can live like a gentleman on the wealth we have accumulated between us—allowing you a liberal share, of course, Hannah."

"Yes," muttered Thad, imitating Hannah's voice as nearly as possible.

"You have been a great help to me in all this business," he went on, feelingly, "and I do not propose that you shall go unrewarded. By the way, how much do you imagine there was in that satchel you found in the cellar, Hannah?"

"I dun'no'," answered Thad.

"Over a million. That is, the actual value would be that if we could realize on the jewels, but, of course we have got to allow for the sharks."

"Yes, sir."

"By the way, how was everything at home when you left?"

This was a poser for Thad.

The question would involve a good deal of talk on his part, and the trouble was to imitate Hannah's voice well enough all through not to excite suspicion. Nevertheless, he felt that the fellow was to some extent in his power, anyway, and he would venture it.

"Very well, sir," he answered.

"Any more trouble from the detectives?"

"Not much, sir."

"They were around again, of course?"

"Oh, yes, sir, but I kept them out."

"That was good. By the way, how much of the swag did you fetch along?"

"I dun'no' how much there is, sir. I jest filled the little bag out o' the big 'un an' fetched it along."

"Well, we shall see when we get out to my place."

A short silence ensued, and Thad decided upon a desperate scheme—a hazardous one, but worth the trying.

"There's one thing kind of bad, sir," he began.

"What is that?" demanded Sutter, with a start.

"The detectives found the bottle with the chloral hydrophobia, or whatever you call it."

"The chloral hydrate, you mean, you poor, silly girl. Well, what of it?"

"They said it was the same stuff as was found in the young man's stomach."

"That is of small consequence, Hannah. I am aware that they have a clear case against me, but when they get everything summed up, as they surely will in course of time, I shall be far beyond their grasp."

"But they also found that ye'd give some of it to missus."

Sutter started violently, turned upon the supposed woman, and demanded, sternly: "How the deuce did they discover that, Hannah?"

"Missus confessed—jest afore she died, sir."

"Just before she died? My God! is she dead, Hannah?"

"Yes, sir!"

"When did she die?"

"A few hours after you left last night."

"This is terrible."

And, from the manner in which the wretch's body shook, Thad gave him credit for more feeling than he had thought him capable of possessing.

But, whatever genuine feeling he might have experienced for the instant, he managed to shake it off with remarkable promptness, and remarked cheerfully:

"Oh, well, we have all got to die some time, and the poor girl is better off, I suppose. She is at last out of her misery. I wish I could have been by her at the last however; it would have looked better. Don't you think so?"

Thad admitted that he thought it would, and there was another silence.

"It is a great wonder that that detective, with all his cunning, should have prowled about there so long without running upon the swag, Hannah."

"That was 'cause it was in sich a queer place, sir."

"It was a queer place, Hannah, and a capital place to escape the sleuths. But, here we are."

The cab had stopped, but when Sutter poked his head out of the window, he seemed to be somewhat bewildered, for he exclaimed, rather brusquely:

"Why, where the deuce are we? Cabby, this is not our place? What are you stopping here for?"

"The ledly said as how this was the place, sor," returned the cabby, with an unaccountable giggle.

Sutter pulled in his head with a sudden jerk, with a view to demanding an explanation from Hannah, and was not only surprised, but horrified, to find the muzzle of a revolver pointing at his face.

"Wha--what does this—"

"Explanations are unnecessary, Mr. Samuel Sutter!" interposed the detective, coolly. "The game is up. Throw up your hands!"

Sutter hesitated, and made an ominous move with his hand.

"None of that!" warned Thad. "Up with your hands, or you are a dead man!"

The villain slowly and sullenly raised his hands, when the crook hunter quickly slipped the handcuffs on his wrists, and then relieved him of his arms.

"Now we are ready to alight, Sammy," announced Thad, cheerily, starting to open the door.

"What place is this?" inquired the prisoner.

"Is it possible that you do not recognize that building? That is sometimes playfully alluded to as Castle Fallon, otherwise the Tombs."

Sutter heaved a deep sigh, but at once, to the detective's surprise, broke out into a boisterous laugh.

"Well, I'll swear!" he ejaculated. "You're a good one! If it is not an impertinence, may I ask you if you are the great detective Burr, of whom I have heard so much?"

"That is my name, sir."

"Well, there is some credit in being finally taken by such a man. I never believed the detective lived who could take me, but you have done it. One more question, if you are not in a hurry."

"As many as you like. This is an all-night house."

"How on earth did you get onto my appointment with old Hannah? She didn't pip?"

"No, she was too loyal for that. Besides, the old girl is in durance herself."

"You don't tell me!"

"Yes; I took her over to Long Island City yesterday."

"But you haven't told me how you dropped onto this appointment."

"The letter to Rosebud did the business."

"Ah, I see. But, how did you manage to get possession of the letter?"

"That came in the regular course."

"I have it. It was all through that demure little kitten, Bettie. She gave you the letter."

"You are an excellent guesser. But if you are through with your catechism, we will alight. I have some other matters to attend to yet to-night."

Sutter quietly climbed out of the cab, and Thad followed. But the swamp fox had no more than struck the ground when he turned to the detective:

"Just one more question, sir, and I am done," he said.

"Very well; go on."

"How the deuce did you manage to make that driver understand that he was to drive here instead of to my place?"

"Oh, I happened to know the driver, and he understands my signs, that is all."

"Well, this beats old Bailey, old Hays, old Vidocq, and all the rest!"

CHAPTER XXXI. THE CONFESSION.

It will be understood that Thad was so sure of the success of his enterprise beforehand that he had perfected all arrangements with regard to his prisoner's commitment, so that, arriving at the Tombs, the show of his warrant to the sergeant in charge sufficed, and the prisoner was quickly in his cell.

It may be as well to also state that, pending the moment when he placed Sutter under arrest and leaving the carriage, the detective made a complete change in his personal appearance by removing the feminine attire, and leaving the masculine, which was underneath, with the exception of a coat, which was in the satchel which he carried.

Thad's first thought after leaving the Tombs prison was to look up poor Tom, whom he had left standing on the elevated station.

Upon his arrival on the platform again, he was surprised to find that the boy was not there.

Fearing that he had wandered off and got lost in the great city, he first made inquiry of the policeman on duty at the station.

As soon as he described the boy to the burly cop, the same who had questioned Thad when he was in woman's attire, the officer exclaimed:

"Phwat, the short little fella wi'd the false whuskers an?"

"That is the chap," replied Thad. "You see—"

"Oi rin him in," promptly interrupted the cop. "He's a crook, he is!"

"What makes you think so?"

"Oi know him, sor. Besides, the very fact av him bein' disguised shows what he is."

"The fact of him being disguised was sufficient to warrant you in arresting him, I'll admit. But, that he is a crook, or that you ever saw him before, is not true. He is an innocent country boy, never was in the city three times in his life, and was doing duty as my deputy. I blame the boy for not explaining this, however."

"Oh, as to the explinashuns, he guv' plinty o' thim—talked about bein' a detective, and all that, an' thin Oi knowed he was a crook. Who are you, anyway?"

Thad coolly exhibited his badge, gave his name, and then said:

"I am the last man in the world to wish to give an officer trouble when he does his duty to the best of his ability; but there is a limit to endurance when an officer adds insolence to his natural ignorance and stupidity. Give me your number, please."

And, glancing at the fellow's shield, and making a note of the number, the detec-

tive turned and left the platform before the astonished policeman could realize what had happened.

It was now necessary to drive to the Tenderloin Precinct, where Tom was confined.

Here the case was explained to the sergeant, and poor Tom was at once set at liberty.

The boy came out with a rueful countenance and a heavy heart.

"I don't want no more detective business," he murmured, as they went away together. "I knowed I'd git arrested with them whiskers on."

"Oh, well, that was a mere coincident, my boy. I had not figured on the thing coming out as it did. If I had been able to remain with you it wouldn't have happened."

When the detective called at the Tombs prison the following day to interview the prisoner, a great change had come over Sutter.

His hauteur, his suavity, his coolness had deserted him; his sweet, engaging smile had faded; the rogue was completely broken.

He received Thad with an air of sullen indifference at first, but grew confidential later.

"There is no hope for me, I know," he began. "In fact, I knew that it would be so if I ever should be caught. I have never taken care of the future; never prepared for defense in the event of capture. My whole idea was to avoid capture. In this my success has been so signal that I had grown careless. Oh, well," he went on, with a sigh, "it could only have been a question of time, at best, and just as well now as later."

"Do you wish to make a confession?" questioned the crook catcher.

"Yes, I suppose I might as well. Pretty much everything will be proven, anyway, and I may as well give you the straight of it."

"It is better that way," interposed Thad.

"I shall not attempt to give you my whole career. It would be a long and tedious story, so I will simply begin by telling you that I was born a thief. This will sound strange to you when I declare that my parents were the most exemplary people and that my early environment was refined and moral. But from my earliest recollection nothing gave me so much pleasure as the taking that which belonged to another.

"Thus I grew up, to all appearances a moral, upright man. I was never dissipated, and had few of the vices common to young men generally. I received a splendid education, and my parents were ambitious that I should enter some of the professions.

"At length I married a woman of considerable wealth and high social standing. It was unnecessary for me to be dishonest then, so I took to gambling as the nearest respectable approach to ordinary thievery, and my wife's fortune was soon frittered away.

"I do not know but I experienced some relief when the last honest dollar was gone, for then there was no excuse for refraining from my favorite calling any longer, and I plunged into it with my whole heart.

"My success was so great from the start that I had soon amassed considerable wealth, and I purchased the land in Queens County and built the house which you have had the pleasure of visiting."

"How did you ever come to build in that swamp?" interrupted Thad.

"Oh, a mere freak. At least partly a freak, and partly to spite my wife, who had said, on discovering my character, that she would rather live in a swamp with an honest man than in a palace on a bill with a thief. I decided that she should live in a swamp with a thief."

Thad shuddered at the man's heartlessness.

"A most unwarrantable and contemptible revenge upon a poor helpless creature," he said, sternly.

"I admit it, but I was born without

feeling. Sentiment is something foreign to my composition. But to resume. Heartless as I was by nature, I might not have been so bad had it not been for a certain person whom you had the pleasure of meeting, and whom you impersonated so cleverly last night."

"You allude to Hannah?"

"Yes."

"I have heard that she wielded a strange influence over you."

"She not only wielded a remarkable influence over me; she controlled me absolutely."

"How was that?"

"Well, when I first moved to the house in the swamp I employed her as domestic, as I would have done any other menial. She had not been in the house a week when she came to me one day and astonished me by rehearsing certain secrets of mine regarding a proposed robbery which I did not suppose any mortal was in possession of, and demanded, as the price of her secrecy, a fair share of the profits.

"I flew into a rage, denounced her and ordered her from my house. In response she coolly disclosed certain other facts with regard to past transactions of mine, which, she very truthfully stated, would only need to be laid before the proper authorities to send me to the gallows. I saw at once that I had a dangerous foe to contend with, and that my only salvation was to make peace with her, and from that on she has been the master.

"But I must give her credit for one thing. Her keen penetration, her inexhaustible resourcefulness, and, above all, her utter fearlessness, have been invaluable to me in my nefarious occupation. Never was she at a moment's loss for an alternative, and she has thwarted the ends of detectives and averted my arrest a hundred times, at least. So you see it was only natural that I should be under obligations to her, aside from her power over me in another direction."

"How came she in possession of these secrets?"

"I have as little idea as you have. It was an equal mystery how she came in possession of hundreds of other secrets. She knew, for instance, that you were a detective, and were stopping at Watson's, long before you had occasion to suspect me of any wrong-doing. She informed me two days before the event of the young man in the buggy that we were operating under the nozzle of the enemy's cannon."

He continued with a lot more details, and finally came down to the crime for which he was under arrest.

"That was a strange piece of business all through," he said. "It was what a fatalist would have called a pre-ordained affair. I had known young Howarth and his sister, the actress, more or less intimately for years, and, like everybody else, they believed me an honest gentleman."

"Through the medium of Hannah's magic telegraphy I had learned of Miss Howarth's diamonds, and we had already planned a robbery, which was to have been carried out on the very night following the afternoon of the accident."

"So, as I say, a fatalist would assume that it was an order of the Fates that young Howarth should have called at my house on his way to the city that afternoon."

"He went to the house, then?"

"I should have said that he stopped in front of the house. I happened to be standing on the porch when he drove up, and went out to him. We conversed a few minutes, and during the conversation he divulged the fact that he had his sister's diamonds with him, and that he was a little nervous over it, inasmuch as he was not very well. He complained of a chill, and said his knees were cold, whereupon I persuaded him to take a glass of liquor. He finally consented to this and I returned to the house for the liquor."

"Up to that time the idea of murdering or robbing him had never entered my head. He was my friend, and I would

have considered it beneath my dignity, but the moment I entered the house Hannah met me and said: 'Going to fix him, aren't you?' 'What do you mean?' I demanded, indignantly. 'You're not going to let those diamonds go by, I hope,' she pursued.

"Well, the result of it was that in five minutes she had me worked up to such a pitch that resistance was impossible; so when I poured out the liquor I put a few grains of chloral hydrate in it. But after I had seen him drink it, and saw him gradually become unconscious, my courage failed me and I dared not rob him, for some reason or other.

"Old Hannah must have anticipated something of the kind, for the next instant she was at the side of the buggy, and, mounting the wheel, without a word, snatched the little satchel containing the jewels from under the seat. She was in a terrific rage, and such was her agitation, that, as she attempted to descend, her foot slipped and she fell, striking her nose on the tire of the wheel. The blood spurted forth, spattering over the buggy and the lap-robe which I had brought out for the young man to put over his knees. In the excitement of the moment I did not notice this, however, and just at that moment Sultan, my St. Bernard dog, came tearing out, giving the horse such a fright that he set off up the hill at full heat, carrying the already lifeless young man, still in a sitting posture, with him.

"As she watched the terrified animal dashing up the hill, Hannah chuckled and said: 'Wal, if that kerrige happens to upshot an' spills out the young critter, it ain't no fault of our'n if he gets killed,' and went off chuckling.

"The remainder of the story your own investigations have made you fully acquainted with, and there is no use of my repeating it. Good-day."

With which the arch villain turned coolly from the grating, threw himself across his prison bed and picked up a newspaper.

The following day Thad again visited the Tombs and remained with Sutter until he was removed to Long Island City, where, a few weeks later, the entire gang were tried and duly convicted.

THE END.

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